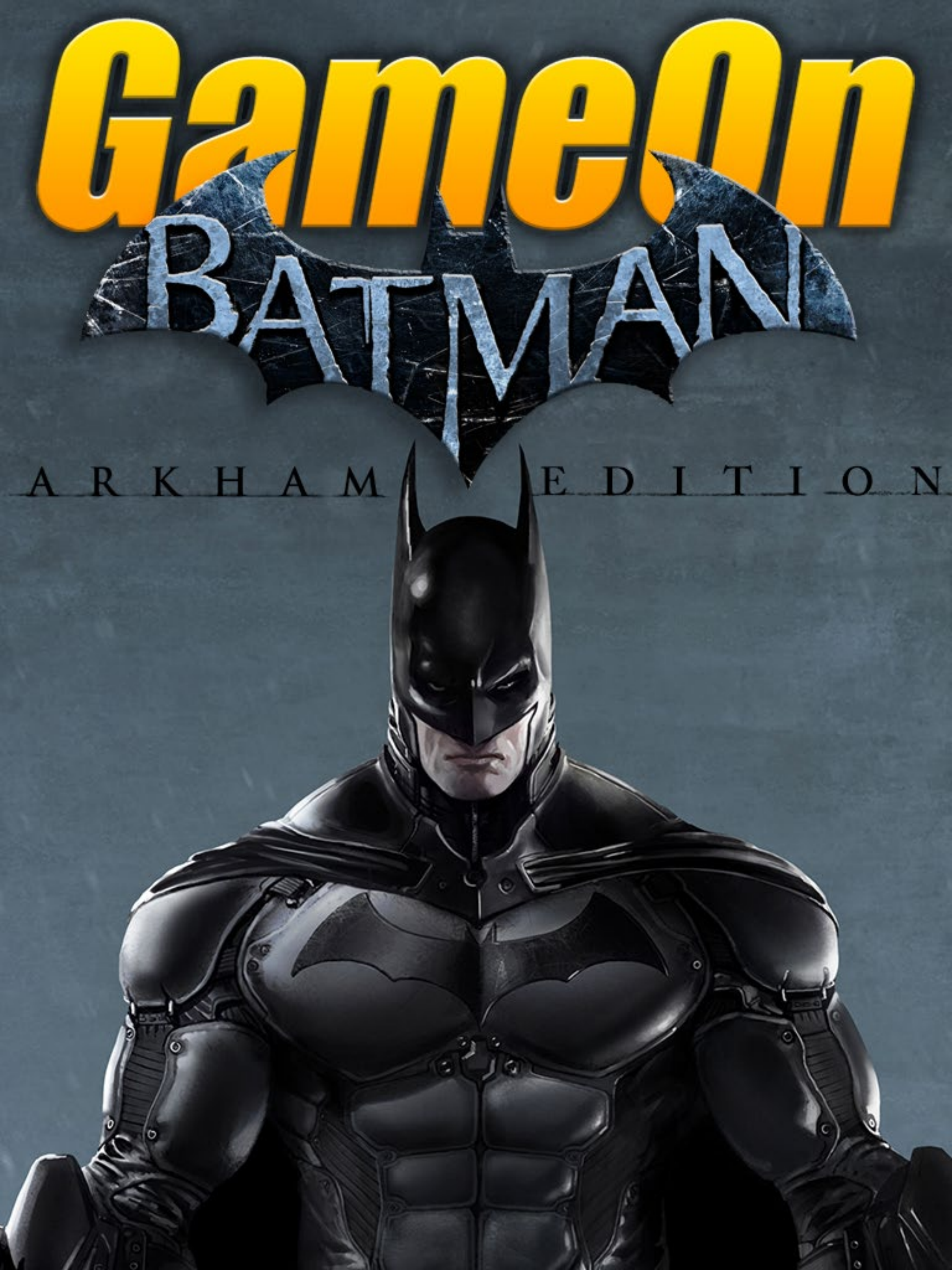
GameOn



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Origins Preview

Travel back to where it all began. Fight as the Dark Knight before Gotham was overrun by criminals and low-lifes.

Gadget Tips

Keep your eyes peeled for our gadget tips sprinkled throughout the magazine to gain some greater insight into some of the Caped Crusader's best gadgets.

Biographies

Find out some more about your favorite villians and heroes from Gotham City including their pasts and first apperances.

Editorial

Welcome to the Batman: Arkham Special Edition of The GameOn Magazine.

You're in for a treat in this issue as we supply you with everything Batman and Arkham related included our reviews of both previous Arkham titles, Arkham Aslyum and Arkham City, our biographies for a few of our favorite characters, and a few articles written by our crack team of ~~detectives~~ writers.

Along with this, we have our Batman: Arkham Origins preview fresh off the press from this year's E3 convention.

So sit back, relax, switch off your Batmobile, unhook your utility belt, pull down your mask and enjoy the special edition magazine.

If you want to get your hands on our monthly copy of the magazine, you can simply click here for the UK Kindle version, here for the International Kindle version or here for the tablet version.

If you'd like to get in touch with us, you can drop us an e-mail at contact@gameonmag.com.

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ABOUT GAMEON

GameOn Networking Ltd was founded in 1997 with the aim of providing “lag free” gaming solutions for dedicated online gamers. Online connectivity in the late 90s was such that realtime gaming was beyond the reach of the average gamer, and so GameOn began hosting LAN parties throughout the UK. To date, GameOn has hosted almost 100 LAN parties.

In August 2008, GameOn began producing GameOn Magazine, an online PDF magazine covering all aspects of gaming including reviews, previews, news and articles. The dedicated magazine staff also provided coverage at high profile gaming events such as E3 and gamescom.

In February 2012, GameOn Magazine launched in ebook form on the Amazon Kindle marketplace in both the UK and US and has since developed from strength to strength. With the same quality coverage as always and dedicated writing and research staff the magazine has gained a loyal following and secured its position as one of the best selling gaming magazines on the Kindle store.

Later in 2012 GameOn lauched the colour version of the magazine via Magzter store which is avilable on Android, iOS and Windows.

For more information, please visit www.gameonmag.com

ABOUT WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT

In 1995, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment licensed out their first game property, Batman Forever. From there, they continued to license games based on Warner Bros. film and TV products to video game publishers such as Ubisoft, EA, Infogrames and the late, great, THQ.

Come 2003, Warner Bros. Interactive co-published their first video game, Looney Tunes: Back in Action with EA. Two years later, in 2005, WB Games label was created and co-published The Matrix Online with Sega.

In 2009, Warner Bros. purchased indie developer, Snowblind Studios. Later that year, Warner Bros. also purchases most of the assets of American publisher, Midway Games. In 2010, they acquired majority stake in Rocksteady Studios, an indie development studio operating out of London who developed Batman: Arkham Asylum and City.

Later in 2010, Warner Bros. Interactive opened a studio in Quebec, Montreal headed up by Martin Tremblay, also known as WB Games Montreal, who would later go on to develop Batman: Arkham Origins.

For more information on Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, any of their subsidiaries, Intellectual Properties or Titles, please visit www.warnerbros.com

I AM BATMAN

There are many reasons to enjoy the Batman: Arkham series of games: A well-rounded combat system, a cast of excellent supporting characters, a rich open world, an abundance of side-activities and many more.

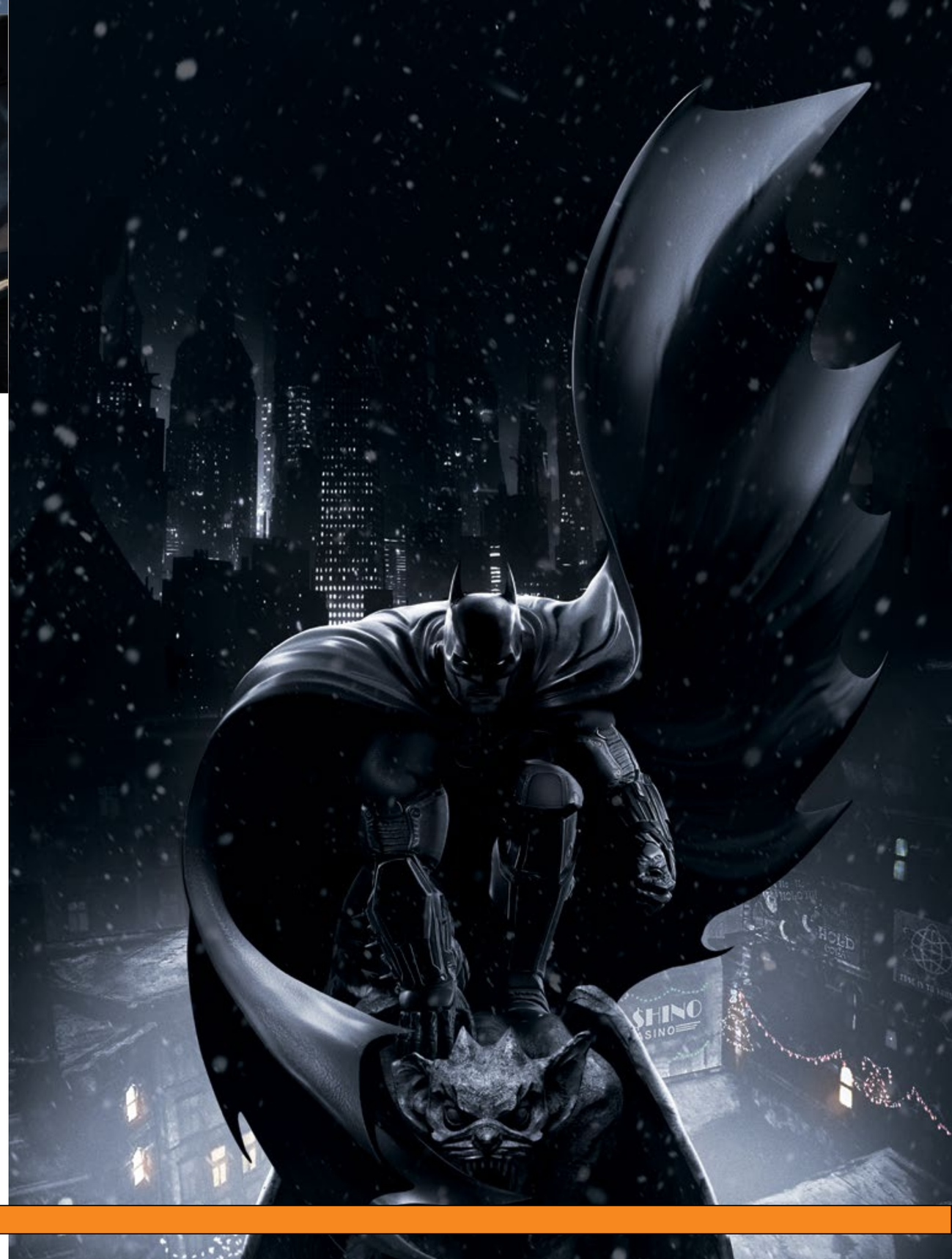
For me though, there is one aspect that makes the experience so epic for me, and that reason is a simple one: I am Batman.

Both Arkham Asylum and Arkham City really let me walk a mile in the boots of the Caped Crusader, the Dark Knight, the World's Greatest Detective. It goes so much further than the skin of the character, the way he looks and the way he moves. For me, the thing Rocksteady have nailed on the head is how it feels to be Batman.

Controlling the Batman just feels right, as you run through the streets, scale sheer surfaces, glide amongst the rooftops and rappel between buildings. The sense of maneuverability is dead on; not quite superhuman, but the kind of feat only achievable by a human being with the right tools, training and at the peak of physical ability.

The gadgets also provide a great deal of depth to the experience. Solving puzzles and following clues in detective mode changes the pace of proceedings, providing a more thoughtful aspect of gaming amongst the high adrenaline combat and tense stealth sections. Tools such as the remote control batarang, disruptor and grappling hook provide you with the tools to cope with any situation and make up for Batman's lack of 'traditional' superpowers.

The fact that our hero's abilities and gadgets stretch the bounds of believability to their limits, but never beyond breaking point, is the main factor that underlies the success of both games in capturing the essence of Batman. There is a real sense of power there, but behind it, a sense of vulnerability.



This is most evident in the combat and stealth mechanics. Hiding in the shadows, Batman is a nightmare incarnate. Henchmen cower and panic as their cohorts disappear, picked off one-by-one by a (seemingly) deadly, unseen force, while our hero watches, waits and strikes. Patience and timing are your friends here, and it really feels just plain badass to clear an area of enemies in this manner.

Get spotted though, and the fists start flying. Batman is highly trained, highly skilled, strong and agile; more than capable of taking on numerous combatants in a toe-to-toe brawl. Combos are brutal and satisfying, as the Dark Knight dodges, block, strikes and throws with perfect timing and unprecedented precision, ending in brutal, but distinctly non-lethal, takedowns.

Miss one beat though and the combo is broken, and when Batman gets hit, it hurts. Clad in his body armour he can take a bit of damage, and it's certainly possible to muddle your way through a fight, trading blows back and forth. You'll feel it though, because tough as he is, behind the Bat lies Bruce Wayne, and Bruce Wayne is just a man. If your skill fails you, failure is very much an option.

Gadget Tip

Special Batarang that can be controlled after being released, making it useful for hitting switches and objects out of reach. Brake and flip controls provide high levels of maneuverability. Hold the Boost to impact into an enemy at high velocity to send them flying. If directed into electricity, the Batarang will retain the electric charge, and can then be utilised to overload items such as fuse boxes.

This is never more apparent than when facing off against armed opponents. Sure, ol' Brucie has a few tricks up his sleeve. The batarang can stun an unwary opponent and the grappling hook can pull the gun from his hands, but when two or three enemies with guns are around it is very easy to get the Batman killed in an open fight. Hell, even baseball bats can cause a problem!

Despite the fact that Batman is extremely skilled and powerful, this sense of weakness is constantly at the back of your mind when in a scrap. You aren't Superman, invulnerable to all with few weaknesses. You aren't even The Flash, mostly human but with a few special abilities. You are Batman, and all the stands between you, death and failure is an armoured breastplate, a couple of gadgets, the environment around you and your ability to fight.

When I play Arkham City and Arkham Asylum: I AM BATMAN. Being Batman feels awesome.

Provided that this balance of power and vulnerability remains intact, and if Warner Montreal have crafted this latest experience with the same level of love and respect that Rocksteady have poured into the franchise so far, then I can't imagine Batman: Arkham Origins to be anything other than a triumph.

Ross D. Brown

THE VILLAINS OF THE ARKHAM FRANCHISE

Everyone loves a bad guy. The imperfections they show compared to their seemingly perfect rivals makes them a source of empathy and love in a way many comic book (and other medium) authors would never expect or intend. Arguably, the Batman series has the best list of villains of any media product worldwide. There's so many famous, cool, and freaky evil guys and gals that it's hard to understand how Batman has the time to lock 'em all up. Of course, this wonderful array of villains can be found, almost in full, in the Arkham Franchise. The games are filled to the brim with dastardly deeds and evil doers, so to help you out we've compiled an informative collection of the best bad guys from the past games and added on the newcomers set to arrive in Arkham Origins. Enjoy!

Or don't, I guess this lot wouldn't want you to.

The Joker

First Appearance: Batman #1 (1940)

Batman's arch foe long before Heath Ledger made the character a hit in The Dark Knight. Mark Hamill's voice work as The Joker in the Arkham series is easily on par with Ledger's work, and the character is much closer to that found in the comics. He takes centre stage in the first game and sneaks his way into the limelight in the second, so expect to see Gotham's kookiest criminal in Arkham Origins. Let's be honest, no Batman game would be complete without him even if Hamill has hung up his bowtie.

Mr Freeze

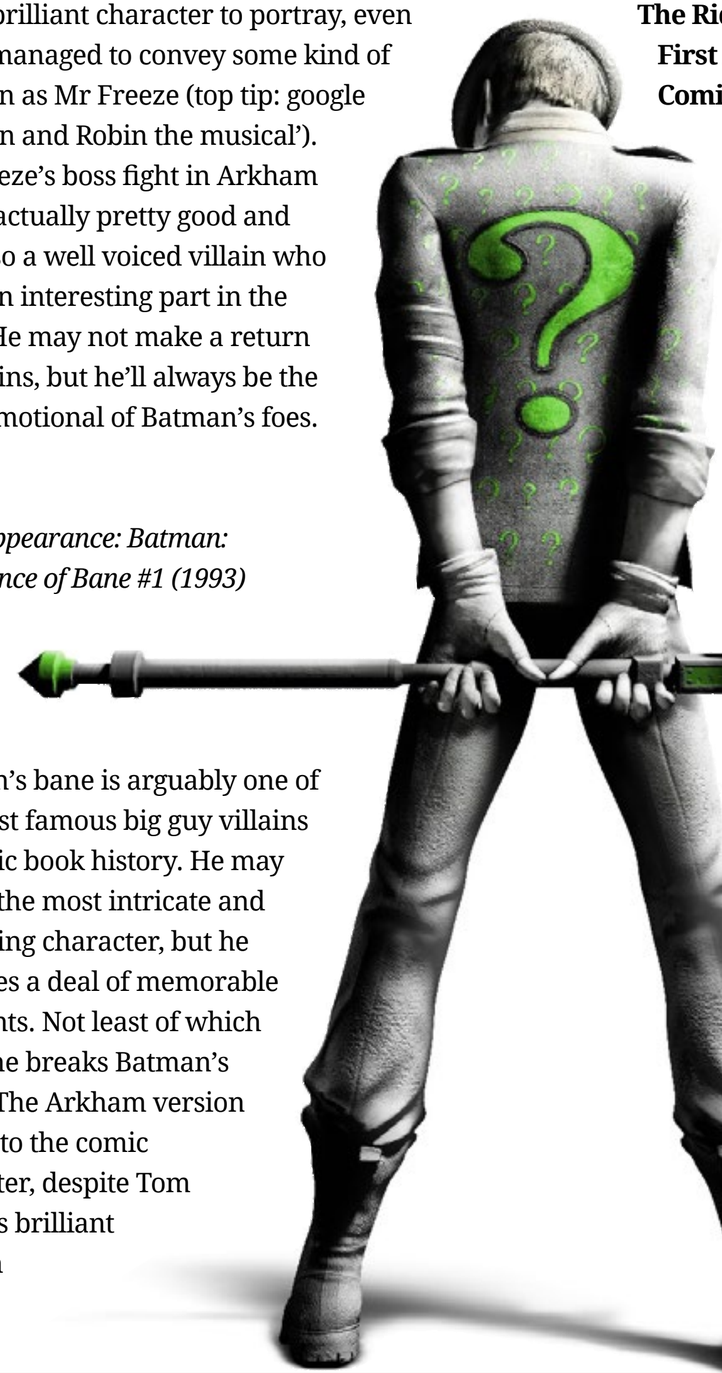
First Appearance: Batman #121 (1959)

A personal favorite; Victor Freis is the classic story of an honest man going to horrible lengths to save the woman he loves. It makes him a brilliant character to portray, even Arnie managed to convey some kind of emotion as Mr Freeze (top tip: google 'Batman and Robin the musical'). Mr Freeze's boss fight in Arkham City is actually pretty good and he's also a well voiced villain who plays an interesting part in the story. He may not make a return in Origins, but he'll always be the most emotional of Batman's foes.

Bane

First Appearance: Batman: Vengeance of Bane #1 (1993)

Batman's bane is arguably one of the most famous big guy villains in comic book history. He may not be the most intricate and intriguing character, but he provides a deal of memorable moments. Not least of which when he breaks Batman's spine. The Arkham version is akin to the comic character, despite Tom Hardy's brilliant spin on Bane in the Dark Knight Rises. His little side missions are fun in Arkham City and he's a respectable boss in Asylum, so we wouldn't be shocked to see him back.



The Riddler

First Appearance: Detective Comics #140 (1948)

The Riddler has always been a tricky character to portray in motion. His character is a really good idea in theory, as the comics demonstrate, but to say that it's been executed well on screen is a little untrue. So it was a great move by the Arkham writers to place him in the background as an all seeing mystery man who appears to follow Batman at every stage of his journey. Edward Nigma plays a strange role in the Arkham franchise; rather than a direct opponent, he lays out little puzzles around Arkham island for you to solve. He's certainly a lot more mysterious in the games. Expect to see his puzzles make a return in Origins.

Scarecrow
First Appearance: World's Finest Comics #3 (1941)
The Scarecrow character is a physical embodiment of the dark element of the Batman universe. There's rarely been a bad use of his freaky mind warping drug style and it's safe to say that his sections in Arkham Asylum are simply astounding. By far one of the most fun bosses to fight in the entire series; the killer blend of Bruce's past life haunting him and Scarecrow's toxin makes for a strange but visually beautiful collection of boss battles. His survival is hinted at throughout Arkham City, so keep your eye out for this one.

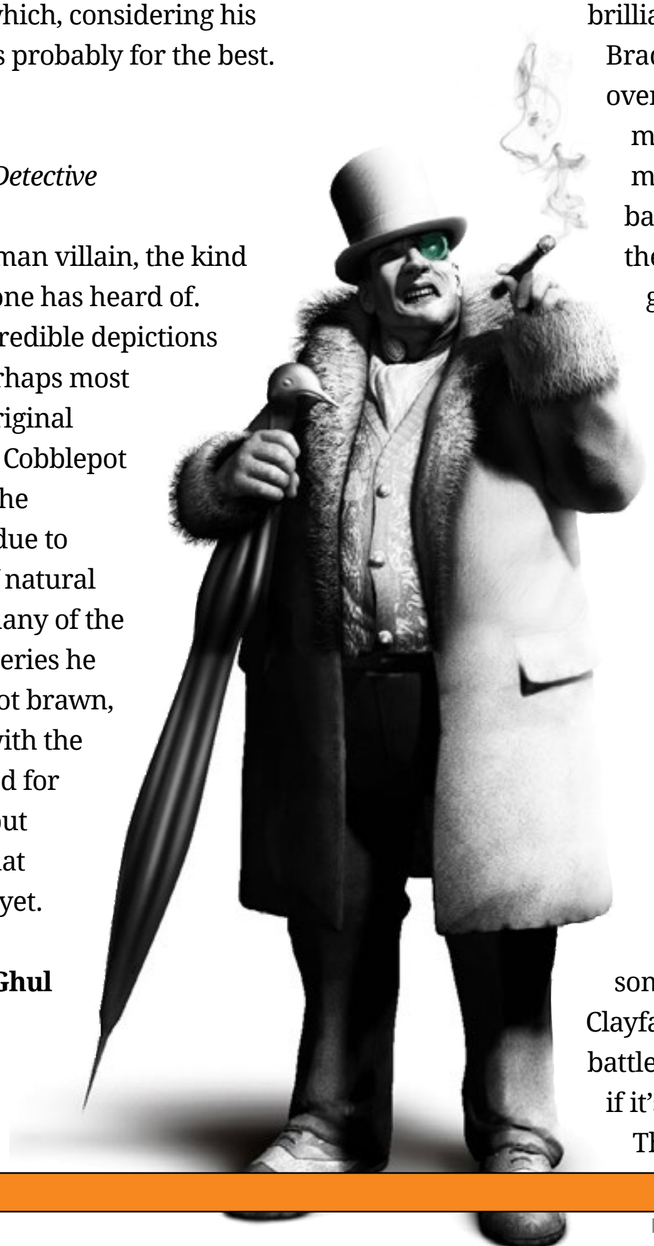
Harley Quinn
First Appearance: Batman: The Animated Series "Joker's Favor" (1992)
A testament to the devotion of Batman fans, Harley Quinn became a comic book constant after fans reacted overwhelmingly positively to her appearances in the brilliant 90s animated Batman series. Her playful attitude perfectly combines with Joker's dangerous habits, and together they make an often hilarious team. The chemistry between the two in the Arkham franchise is never quite as strong as in the animated series, perhaps due to the lack of comical effort from the writing team. But to be fair, the games are even darker than the animation.

Solomon Grundy
First Appearance: All-American Comics #61 (1944)
"Solomon Grundy, born on a Monday, Christened on Tuesday..." A giant zombie who's been granted everlasting life by a lazarus pit. That's a bad combination to face as an opponent. Grundy's back story is actually explored in some depth in Arkham City, but it's all done so in the background so you need to pay attention to get all the detail. His role as Penguin's 'pet' does seem a little harsh considering the fight with Solomon is a lot more fun than the annoyance of fighting Penguin himself. Still, a timeless Batman villain whose nursery rhyme still causes chills to this day.

Hugo Strange
First Appearance: Detective Comics #36 (1940)
The lead antagonist in Arkham City (kind

of), Hugo Strange is a normal individual, compared to the other psychotic villains, that is. He's one of the few opponents who really gets inside Batman's head, a point exemplified in Arkham City by his Big Brother-esque overwatching attitude. His role in the games is actually a bit of a let down by the end of it. His character and use in the Batman comics, however, is a cut above the rest. In Origins, you're unlikely to see his return which, considering his exposure in City, is probably for the best.

Penguin
First Appearance: Detective Comics #58 (1941)
A truly classic Batman villain, the kind that almost everyone has heard of. He's had some incredible depictions over the years, perhaps most iconically in the original Batman TV series. Cobblepot fits perfectly into the Batman universe due to his notable lack of natural powers; but like many of the characters in the series he relies on brains, not brawn, to settle his feud with the Bat. He's confirmed for Arkham Origins, but we don't know what role he'll play just yet.



Ra's and Talia al Ghul
First Appearances: Batman #232 (1971) & Detective Comics #411 (1971)
The deadly father-daughter duo are true DC universe big guns. Talia's odd relationship with Bats means she's one of the most confusing characters in the whole series. The Arkham franchise does away with the confusion and presents her as the classic 'evil Talia with not so secret feelings'. Ra's is actually one of the best characters in the whole series, and is brilliantly voiced by Dee Bradley Baker. His overarching role in the main plot is a great mystery and the big battle with him towards the end of the game is great fun. However, if you think you killed him off then you may want to think again. If you return to where his body was pinned against the Arkham gate, you'll find that it has disappeared.

Of course, there are a whole host more, too many to go into detail on. Poison Ivy is a key character in the first game and has some great boss segments. Clayface provides the final battle of Arkham City, even if it's not a great one. The Mad Hatter has a tea party which is just full on freaky, plus Deadshot has an interesting sub-plot in City. Zsasz is a minor character in both games but has a fun city-spanning sub-plot as well, it's actually one of the best in the whole game. Two-Face is of course very important in the early stages of Arkham City, and is voiced by VA gaming star Troy Baker. Not forgetting the first game, Killer Croc makes an appearance in a decent underground section, plus you can catch small glimpses and easter eggs of other characters: The Ventriloquist, Calendar Man, Azrael and Black Mask.

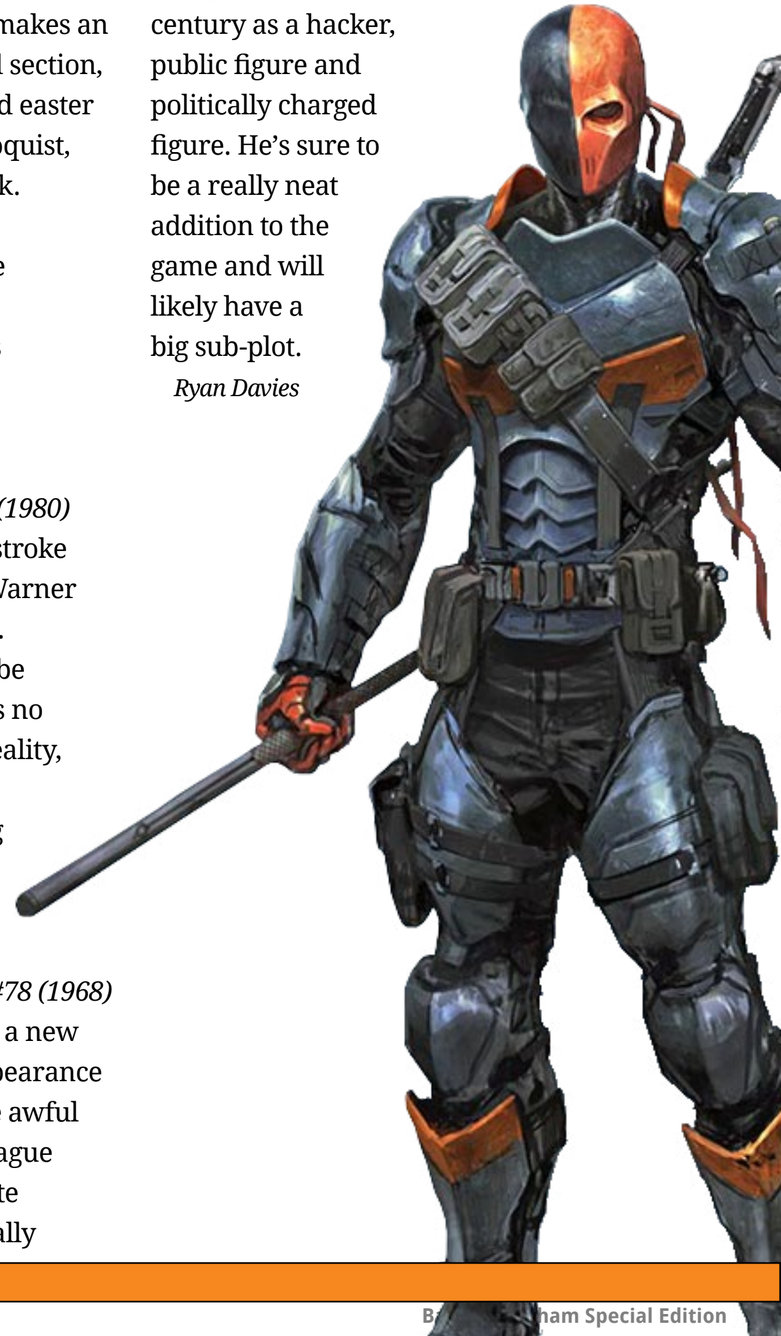
It wouldn't be a proper Batman game without a bunch of new characters. Believe it or not, Warner Bros. games haven't exhausted the list just yet.

Deathstroke
First Appearance: New Teen Titans #2 (1980)
The big new boy on the block, Deathstroke has been touted loud and proud by Warner Bros. since the game was announced. His super quick combat style should be interesting to play against and there's no denying his incredible coolness. In reality, we're looking forward to playing as Deathstroke more than we're looking forward to playing against him.

Copperhead
First Appearance: Brave and the Bold #78 (1968)
Redesigned specifically for the game, a new female Copperhead will make an appearance and is not in any way based upon the awful looking Copperhead in the Justice League TV show. She's an assassin with a taste for exotic poisons and looks like a really interesting spin on the original character.

Anarky
First Appearance: Detective Comics #608 (1989)
The main antagonist of the all new Beware the Batman animated series, Anarky is, as his name suggests, a real rebel. Origins looks to bring Anarky to the 21st century as a hacker, public figure and politically charged figure. He's sure to be a really neat addition to the game and will likely have a big sub-plot.

Ryan Davies



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASLYUM REVIEW

Platforms: PC. Xbox 360, PS3
Date: August 2009
Genre: Action-adventure, beat 'em up
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

There are few superheroes to have such an impact as Batman. Having spawned several iterations of comic books, films and games, it is obvious that we're never going to be fully satiated on Batman themed products. But is Eidos' latest Batman game, Arkham Asylum, all Dark Knight, or should it be committed?

With the varied and deep world of Batman, Eidos' had a pick of ideas and storylines to pursue. In this case, they chose to focus on the story of Arkham Asylum, the place where many of Gotham City's super-criminals are taken. At the start of the game, Joker has been recaptured by Batman who hurries him back to the asylum. He soon realises that all is not right, and continues on to make sure his arch nemesis is safely locked up. Which, of course, he is not.

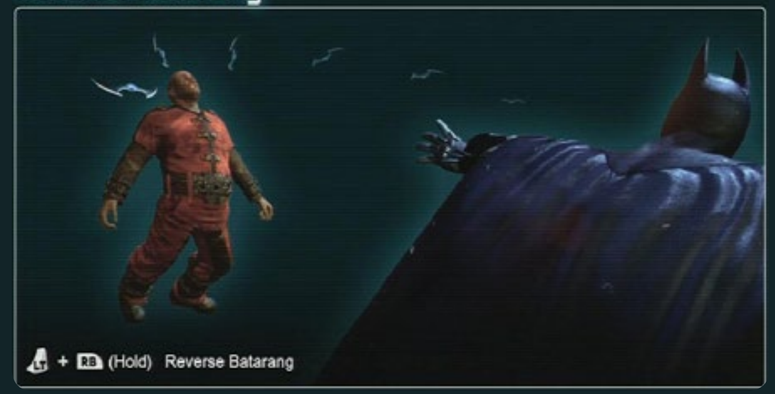
Thanks to Joker's antics, Batman is stuck on Arkham Island, and must fight his way through many of the bad guys. The storyline is an enjoyable one, albeit not as epic as it initially begins with. Joker's promise of many of the super-villains coming to Arkham Island never truly comes to fruition, with encounters with only four of them. It would be nice to have a few more of Batman's greatest enemies showing their face throughout the game.

The game is semi-open world - once you finish the starting area, you are allowed to travel anywhere you like. However, there are a variety of obstacles that prevent the Bat from continuing on - thus forcing you to take the intended route. Whilst this could be construed as a problem, it is countered by the variety of collectables that are in each area.

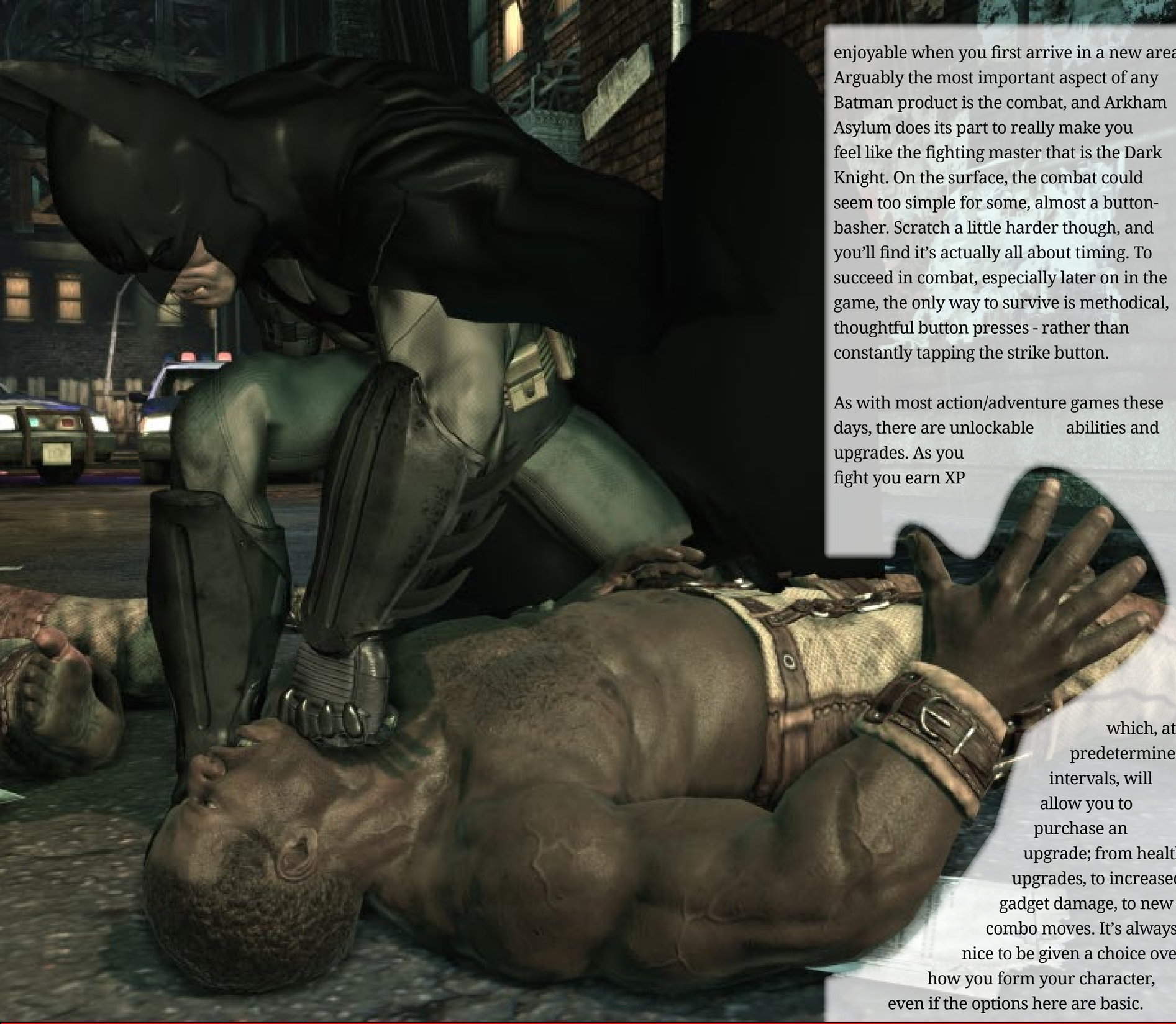
Early on in the game, The Riddler makes himself heard, providing you with a list of riddles that are to be solved in each area. These range from simple chattering teeth to be destroyed, to riddles that are to be solved by scanning the area for a particular, Riddler-described object. As with the main game, many of these are unattainable without the right gadget; but instead of proving to be an annoyance, this makes exploration of the areas

Gadget Tip

Reverse Batarang



This special pre-programmed Remote Batarang will loop back on itself and hit an enemy from behind, leaving them dazed and confused while searching for their attacker in the wrong direction. It is perfect for disorientating an enemy so that Batman can sneak up and take them down during the confusion.



enjoyable when you first arrive in a new area. Arguably the most important aspect of any Batman product is the combat, and Arkham Asylum does its part to really make you feel like the fighting master that is the Dark Knight. On the surface, the combat could seem too simple for some, almost a button-basher. Scratch a little harder though, and you'll find it's actually all about timing. To succeed in combat, especially later on in the game, the only way to survive is methodical, thoughtful button presses - rather than constantly tapping the strike button.

As with most action/adventure games these days, there are unlockable abilities and upgrades. As you fight you earn XP which, at predetermined intervals, will allow you to purchase an upgrade; from health upgrades, to increased gadget damage, to new combo moves. It's always nice to be given a choice over how you form your character, even if the options here are basic.

As the game continues, at major points you'll be given access to some of Batman's many gadgets. Naturally you start with the famous batarangs and grapple, but by the end you'll be making use of explosive gel, a batclaw, a variety of enhanced batarangs and a line-shot for traversing large holes in the ground. Making good use of these adds to the Batman feel of this game, with many of them being used on-the-fly in combos during a fight.

The graphics of this game are glorious; from the heavy rain of the opening cut-scene to the cluttered environments of the asylum, there isn't a moment in this game where the graphics don't hold up. The dark and moody setting is a perfect place to play out this story of the Batman, add this to some excellent voice-acting - done mostly by the animated series' cast - and it's hard not to become absorbed into the game's world. It's never been this fun to play as the Dark Knight.

The game itself, however, is rather short. It's possible to see the game through to completion within ten to twelve hours. Now, for a game of this type, this is above average, but so perfectly crafted is the flow of the game it's hard not to want the game to last much longer; especially considering the vast number of possible bad guys that could add just as much entertainment to the game. As I say, though, the storyline of the game is well paced and it's unfair to judge the game simply because it ends.

However, while the storyline is well measured, the gameplay itself is far more stuttered. Each

new room you enter provides a new challenge but, unfortunately, it is very specific in the way that it is solved. For example, you may enter one room filled with unarmed inmates which means the only solution is to take them out in combat. Enter a room with armed inmates, however, and it is obvious that the only way to survive is to stealthily take them out one by one. Again, the gameplay is never unlikeable and it is just as well paced as the story, but it'd be nice to be given a little more free reign over Batman's abilities, rather than being ushered into a predetermined tactic.

And herein lies the beauty of the game; being given control of one of the most deadly and popular superheroes of all. Every aspect of the Dark Knight, the gliding, the combat, the stealth, the gadgets - everything that makes Batman the popular character that he is - has been perfected into what can only be the best Batman game to date.

Even once the game has ended there are the challenge rooms to attempt. These take two modes, Predator or Freeflow (Stealth or Combat in other words). To succeed in Predator Challenges, you are required to take out the armed inmates as stealthily as you can. Each level has three different challenges, which require you to take out your enemies in certain ways. Manage all three in one challenge and you'll receive three medals.

Freeflow Challenges are much simpler; you earn a score for taking out your enemies, with the difficult ramping up over four rounds. This is where the combat of the game truly shines. To get anywhere near achieving three medals in these modes you will need to be able to string together all of Batman's abilities, as well as making sure you're not hit by anyone, to achieve the highest bonus points. With a leaderboard and the inevitable one-upmanship from your friend's list, these will provide a lot of extra replay value once the game is over.

All in all, Batman: Arkham Asylum is a fantastic feat. It's not without its minor flaws, but everything about the Big Bad Bat has been perfected, and it is definitely a must-play for anyone, Batman fan or not. Now all there is left to do, is to wait for Eidos to bring this perfected Dark Knight to a sprawling open-world Gotham City.

Adam Barnes

Batman: Arkham Asylum
Scored: 7.5 out 10

A COMBAT REVOLUTION

I would argue that through all the brilliant elements of the Arkham series, from the great storylines to the super fun stealth mechanics, it's the 'Freeflow' combat system that makes it such a great collection of games. Not only this, but the combat system is so good that it's heavily influenced some of the biggest games out there, not to mention a huge collection of other titles. The combat in the Arkham series is truly revolutionary.

Let's start at Arkham Asylum, where the series began and the combat system first impressed players. The slow and sombre walk through the prison with The Joker in tow, is a famously well executed scene that expertly builds up to The Joker's escape. It's at this point, with a bunch of goons descending on him, that players get their first true feel of how Batman can handle himself; and boy is it fun. The genius of the system is that it's very simple, essentially just two or three buttons to push, but requires a sense of timing that needs to be trained and honed. Nailing the timing and taking out a huge group of guys in one glorious combo is what the combat is all about.

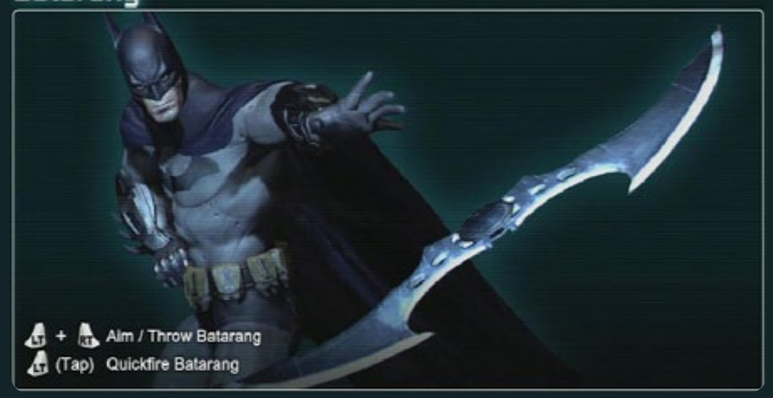
For those who need a refresher, here's how it works. Pressing the X button (360 pad) makes Batman strike the nearest goon and it takes a few of these strikes to take one down; although obviously this depends on the opponent. Using perfect timing and a sense of momentum, the player can hop from bad guy to bad guy purely with the strike button. This is the basic premise and it's brilliantly pleasing all on its own. But of course there are various additions to the system, like countering (with the B button), knife dodging and using Batman's various gadgets (with Y). By the end of the first game there are a huge number of ways to take down the baddies, but the core principles of timed strikes and momentum building are still critical.

So with a solid system already established, it was simple enough for Rocksteady to transfer the same Freeflow combat style to their more adventurous outing, Arkham City. The free-roaming nature of the game made it a perfect setting for a deal of fisticuffs. Despite the solid groundwork, the developers also included a host of new combat features such as countering multiple enemies at once, new enemies that require special actions and aerial attacks. Arkham City currently represents the pinnacle of the Freeflow combat system, but there's no doubt that Warner Montreal will be looking to make it even better for Arkham Origins. So what is it that makes the combat

in the Asylum games so satisfying? Obviously the key element is the flow of the system; it requires just a small nudge of direction from the player to move the character towards one enemy and then a heavy handed press of the strike button to take him on, a process that can be repeated to glorious effect. The player action of moving between opponents, which is where many games falter, is practically removed to increase the sense of fluidity. Of course, a good fluid system would be pointless without bone-crunching after-effects, and this is another ingredient to the combat genius. The combination of well constructed sound effects, timed slow-mo and context sensitive actions gives the combat system a true sense of power and weight. Despite his agility, Batman is a bruiser and the Arkham combat conveys this in style.

Gadget Tip

Batarang



Batman's signature weapon, used to stun enemies or hit objects that are out of reach. The Quickfire Batarang can be used to unleash up to three rapid fire Batarangs in the middle of combat. A Quick Batarang throw is also very effective when discovered by a single armed enemy, stunning them to provide enough time to escape.

For many people, the Freeflow system is the pinnacle of in-game combat mechanics, and I'm inclined to agree. To back us up, there's a host of games out there that have been majorly influenced by the Arkham combat. In many ways it's started a new era of hand to hand combat in adventure and third person games. Assassin's Creed 3 is a notable game that combined the Freeflow mechanic with the pre-established AC style, it has its differences and feels a lot lighter but you can feel the inspiration. Sleeping Dogs' combat is very similar and also very satisfying, and you can also play Captain America: Super Soldier which practically copies the mechanic. There are a huge list of games that have been influenced by Freeflow, and I've taken to using Arkham City as a point of reference in many of my reviews. Of course, like any great concept, the combat mechanic in the Arkham games has its critics. Some feel that the system is too easy, and can make the player almost too powerful. Another issue for certain players is that it doesn't require a lot of input from the player. I would counter these arguments by saying that the system may be easy to start with, but in order to build up long and powerful combos, you need to really pay attention to the moves you make. You also need to be observant for counter opportunities and unusual enemies.

Personally, I'm interested in Arkham Origins almost purely because of the combat system. I want to see how Warner Montreal handle the mechanics, and if they can make any real improvements. Fact is, there's no way they can ruin it. The Arkham series has the best, and most revolutionary, hand to hand combat system in any game ever. Disagree? I will fight you.

Ryan Davies

BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY REVIEW

Platforms: PC. Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U
Date: October 2010
Genre: Action-adventure, beat ‘em up
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

Alongside Spider-Man, Batman is one of the most recognisable comic book characters in history. Established in 1939, the Caped Crusader has fought hundreds of villains, starred in thousands of comics and has captured the imagination and love of millions of people all around the globe. With a successful, albeit cheesy, TV show and a fantastic series of films from directors such as Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan, it was only a matter of time before the Dark Knight took to the world of video games. Various itterations had been published before but Arkham Asylum, even now, remains proof that not all comic book tie-in titles have to suck, and is still considered to be one of the best games of the last few years. Since then, fans have been clamouring to get little tidbits of information regarding a sequel. That very game titled Arkham City is finally here and a question must be asked: can this new title stand tall with its pointy ears held up high, or should it shrink back into the darkest corners of the Batcave and remain there forever? It’s time to find out.

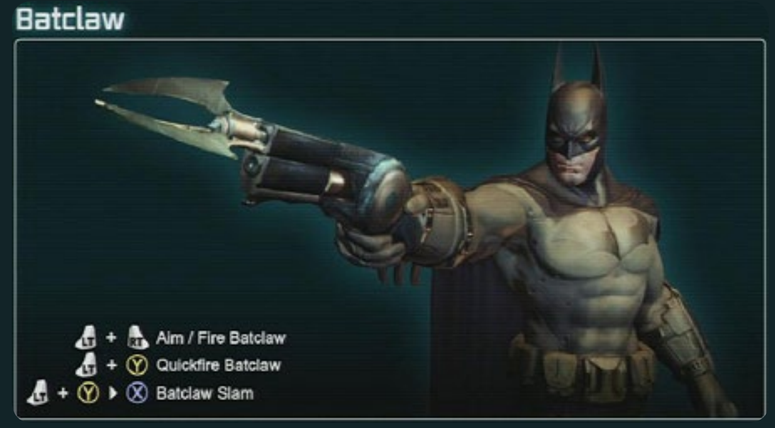
Arkham City takes place a year after the inmates took over the asylum, and begins with Bruce Wayne trying to shut down a closed-off part of Gotham that now houses all of the prisoners from both Arkham and Blackgate. After a rally goes slightly wrong, Wayne finds himself at the hands of Hugo Strange, a crazed individual who now leads Arkham City and who also knows the identity of Batman. It’s from here that it all begins: after a genuinely jaw-dropping beginning that rivals the pretty amazing opening sequence of Arkham Asylum, Batman finds himself trapped in a make-shift prison that now houses new villains such as Two-Face, Mr Freeze, Penguin and a whole plethora more. Catwoman even rears her pointy feline ears every now and then.

When the tale is written by Paul Dini (an actual author for the Batman comics), you immediately know that the story is going to be pretty good and it doesn’t disappoint. Over the course of the game, Batman finds himself in some tricky situations that will have you on the edge of your seat and when two villains come together and fight, it genuinely is mesmerizing, coupled with brilliant dialogue that develops the characters considerably well and Arkham City is a treasure chest full of gold for anyone who at least has an interest in the Batman world. Special recognition should go to the scene between Two-Face and Catwoman close to the start: it’s easily one of the best moments of the whole game.

But it doesn’t matter how good the story is if the title isn’t fun. Gameplay was one of the many areas that Arkham Asylum shone in and Arkham City is no different. There aren’t any game-changing additions to the new title but there’s just enough for it to remain fun, engrossing and, most of all, fresh for the duration of the game. The brilliant stealth portions from Arkham Asylum return in the sequel and are as amazing as they have ever been. Stalking enemies in the shadows, waiting for them to make a move, and then swooping down to take them out before

Gadget Tip

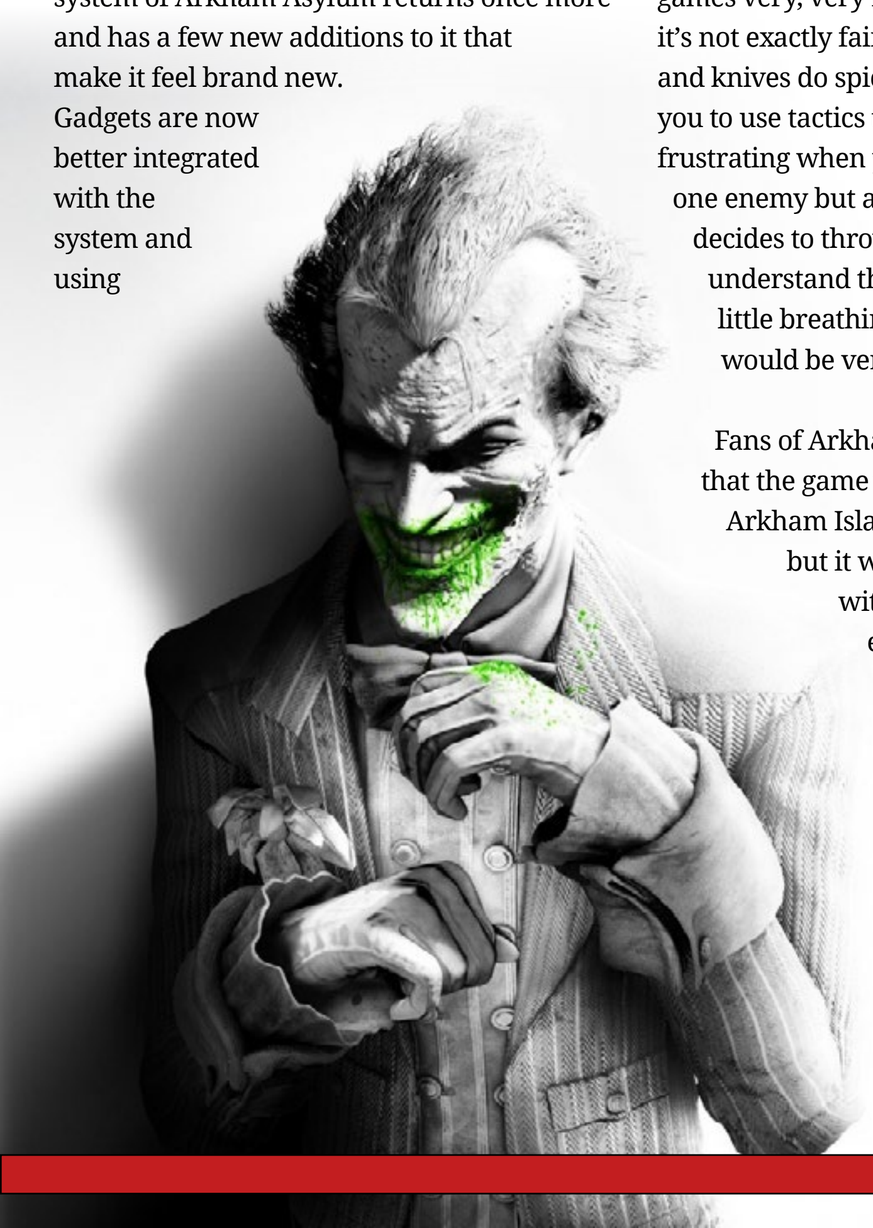
Batclaw



Fires a claw-like projectile that interacts with out of reach objects and pulls them towards the user. In combat, the Batclaw can be used on enemies and followed up immediately by a Strike attack to perform the Batclaw Strike. This does double the damage of a normal Strike but takes more time to perform, leaving Batman vulnerable to attack.

disappearing back into the shadows whilst the others check the area: these parts are just so satisfying. Surprisingly, these moments remain fun all the way through the game and crop up enough to stop the game from becoming repetitive, but don't occur too often that they become unwelcome and annoying.

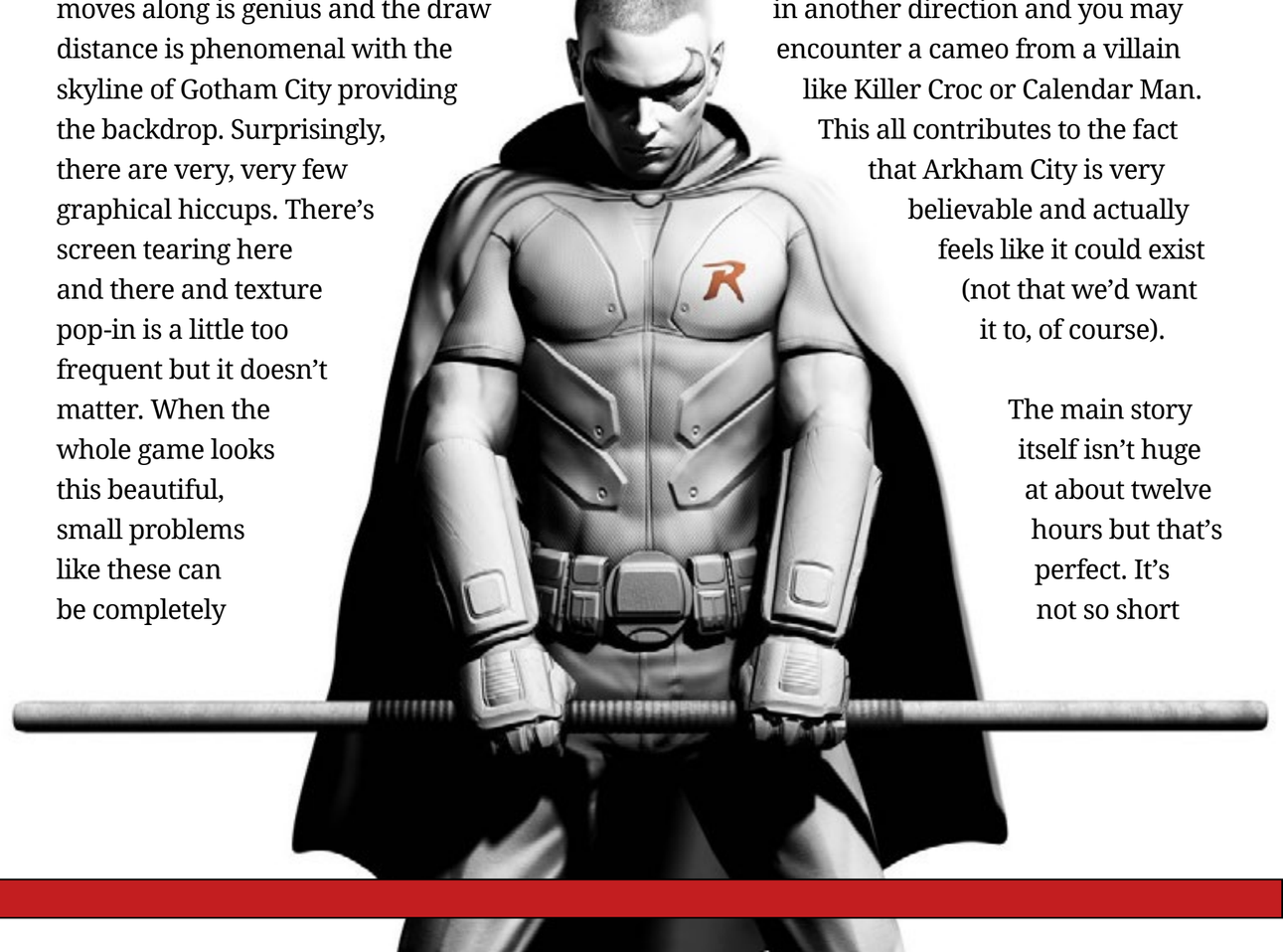
Alongside stealth, Batman is also very good with his fists. The fluid hand-to-hand combat system of Arkham Asylum returns once more and has a few new additions to it that make it feel brand new. Gadgets are now better integrated with the system and using Batarangs, explosives and the Batclaw, is easier than it has ever been thanks to the fact that all of these apparatus have hotkeys assigned so you can take them out and use it on the fly. The fact that combat consists of a grand total of four buttons (attack, counter, stun and jump/evade) is brilliant and allows new players to take down foes with ease. Like most games, Arkham City is not perfect and the enemies you fight are one of the games very, very few negatives: sometimes it's not exactly fair. Enemies with riot shields and knives do spice it up a bit and require you to use tactics to win but it can become frustrating when you're trying to take down one enemy but a guard with a massive crate decides to throw it at you at the same time. I understand that it's meant to be fast but a little breathing time every now and then would be very welcome in my opinion.



Fans of Arkham Asylum will remember that the game was semi-open-world: Arkham Island was there to explore but it was more one big courtyard with a few buildings you could explore. In the sequel, this has been expanded: Arkham City is a fully open world to explore and explore it you will want to. The world feels very believable and lived in and is highly atmospheric. Debris blows around the streets, destruction caused by the prisoners is everywhere and shouting in the distance all contributes to make this game as immersive as it is: you will be drawn into this world and will not want to leave for a very long time. Swooping between buildings and gliding from great heights makes you feel like Batman, and a force to be reckoned with, as you watch the ground from the vantage points above like the watchmen and protector you are meant to be. The world of Arkham City is huge at about five times the size of the area in the first game so there's a lot to explore, see and do.

Graphically Batman: Arkham City is pitch perfect. Characters look fantastic and the city looks stunning even as you see it over and over again. The way Batman's suit gets rougher and rougher as the game moves along is genius and the draw distance is phenomenal with the skyline of Gotham City providing the backdrop. Surprisingly, there are very, very few graphical hiccups. There's screen tearing here and there and texture pop-in is a little too frequent but it doesn't matter. When the whole game looks this beautiful, small problems like these can be completely forgiven.

At first, it seems like the sequel is very similar to Mafia 2: a linear game of sorts set in a huge open world but it quickly becomes apparent that this is not the case. Yes, Arkham City does have a linear storyline as you travel from one area to the next completing objectives but there is so much more to do. Side quests, random encounters, hundreds of hidden collectibles: Arkham City is a game that is meant to stay in your console for a very long time indeed. And you'll want to explore every single nook and cranny that the world has to offer. Stray off the beaten path and you'll find Crime Alley, the alleyway where Batman's parents were killed. Veer in another direction and you may encounter a cameo from a villain like Killer Croc or Calendar Man. This all contributes to the fact that Arkham City is very believable and actually feels like it could exist (not that we'd want it to, of course).



The main story itself isn't huge at about twelve hours but that's perfect. It's not so short

that it's over and done with in a flash and it isn't so long that it's filled with moments that are boring and do nothing but drag the length out and diminish your interest in what happens next. Of course, with all the side quests, collectibles and exploring to do, you could spend a hundred and twelve hours finishing it all off. I agree in huge game times but sometimes I would spend an hour doing the side missions then return to the main story and don't have a clue what's going on because my mind has been on other things. Thankfully, Rocksteady have included a story synopsis option on the main menu and this describes Arkham City perfectly. The developers have really thought about what makes a good game and have just gone and done it. Thankfully, I can say it works brilliantly.

And if the main campaign wasn't enough there's the Challenge Rooms from Arkham Asylum thrown in too, just to make sure you don't trade in your copy just yet. Like most of the game, these have been expanded and are as addictive as ever. Combat Rooms will have you playing for ages and are good practice for the most difficult parts of the campaign, and the Predator sections will have you smiling with delight as you realise just how much you feel like Batman. Alongside more Challenge Rooms to unlock, there's also Concept Art and 3D Character Trophies to get. Even if you only play the campaign once, you'll be visiting these parts of the game for many, many weeks to come.

But I assure you, you won't want to play the campaign just once, mainly because of how awesome it is, but also because of the addition of New Game Plus. Finishing the story once will unlock this, allowing you to replay the whole campaign but with all of the upgrades you already have. It's here that the game comes alive as you can perform exciting manoeuvres early in the game, as you already have the fancy equipment unlocked. Even though the story is only twelve hours, you'll be spending a lot longer in New Game Plus as it's just so much fun.

For anyone who buys the game brand new, you receive a code that allows you to download four extra missions starring everyones favourite feminine feline, Catwoman. These aren't just thrown in for the sake of it, they genuinely change the game. At the start, you see how Catwoman is kidnapped by Two-Face and you get to play it. That's exactly

what these missions are. They allow you to see similar events that tie into the main game but from different perspectives. Catwoman handles very much like Batman in regards to the combat but the way she moves around the city is a little different: she climbs the walls instead of swooping along. This is brilliant as it allows you to get a breather from the main game and it adds a little diversity into a game that in fact was pretty diverse to begin with. It's a welcome addition. I recommend downloading them before you start the main game as they are then integrated seamlessly with the main story whereas you would have to play them separately from the main menu if you finish the game then download them. They're brilliant.

I'm on the third page of writing this review and I feel I should be wrapping up now, but I don't want to. There's so much I want to tell you, so many more reasons that need to be told as to why this is the Game of the Year so far. I haven't even mentioned the exciting encounter with Mr Freeze towards the end, the awesome side quest that has you tracking an assassin and how fantastic the voice acting in the game is. I've reviewed many games in my time here at GameOn, like Gears of War 3, Deus Ex: Human Revolution and LA Noire, but I have never ever given out a 10. Giving a game that score generally means that it's perfect but that's not what Arkham City is; it's just so good that it's as close to perfect as you can get. Batman: Arkham City is this generation's defining title: a game that all other games will want to be. Rocksteady are now the developers all other developers will look up to. If this doesn't win Game of the Year then something is seriously wrong with the world. Just play this and lose yourself in what is, without a doubt, one of the greatest gaming achievements of not just the past few years, but in history. Simply put, Batman: Arkham City is a masterpiece.

Adam Woodward

Batman: Arkham City
Scored: 10 out 10

BATMAN ARKHAM: CITY - A RETROSPECTIVE

Back in October 2011, Batman: Arkham City was released to overwhelming critical acclaim, with many citing it as the best title of the year and a plethora of awards being thrown in its direction. Regarded as one of the greatest third-person action games of all time, it's easy to assume that the title still holds up almost two years later, but with other such acclaimed releases in the same genre having appeared since then is Arkham City still worthy of the perfect score this reviewer gave it back in 2011?

For those who are unaware, Arkham City is the second in the 'Arkham' series of Batman titles from Warner Bros. Interactive, being the successor to Arkham Asylum in 2009 and to be followed by Arkham Origins in October 2013. It follows the story of the Caped Crusader as he uncovers a conspiracy in a cordoned off area of Gotham City that has been transformed into a makeshift, mass-scale prison where the most devious villains ever encountered by Batman are housed, such as Two-Face, Poison Ivy, Bane and, of course, the Joker.

Without entering the dark areas of Spoilersville, one of Arkham City's most praised features, alongside its visuals and gameplay was its storyline, a plot that was not afraid to take the characters to places few pieces have done before. By simply 'offing' one of the franchises most prominent players, the series is immediately catapulted into previously uncharted territory as players are left to wonder in what direction the next game will take as it continues the storyline now its key character, a presence so many critics and fans have commended, is wiped out? As the final seconds of Arkham City play out, it's simply impossible not to have chills ripple down the back of everyone's necks and, in some cases, a single tear may make itself known.

But the title works mainly because of the multi-faceted, multi-layered gameplay that is its very beating heart, yet two years later, is it still as great as it was back in 2011? Recent titles like Remember Me have tried to take aspects of Arkham City and made it their own but since none of them have been able to replicate them to the original standards of greatness, it shows that even two years later, the gameplay of Arkham City still works. The combat is still as fast and as fluid as it was when it was first released and sneaking up on guards before breaking their necks, blowing up the floor beneath them or dangling them from gargoyles is by no means less brilliant now in 2013. This isn't to suggest that gaming has not developed since the title's release, however: it is simply proving how brilliant and well-crafted Arkham City was by stating that it has not lost its magic.

Gadget Tip
Freeze Cluster
+ Aim / Throw Freeze Cluster
This advanced Freeze weapon technology creates a large blast radius capable of freezing multiple enemies at once. Trapped enemies are free to move their torsos and can still attack, so Batman must approach enemies with firearms from behind to minimise any risk.

But how does Arkham City stand amongst the new Batman canon? With the release of the final instalment to Christopher Nolan's masterful trilogy, The Dark Knight Rises, and a recent announcement that the Caped Crusader will be joining Zack Snyder's Man of Steel sequel in 2015 - it would be incorrect to say that interest in Batman is decreasing. So with so much brilliance surrounding the franchise, it's amazing that Arkham City still stands tall amongst all the releases, be it on television, the cinema screen or as a video game. Arkham City is still brilliant: that fact has been mentioned a hundred times before but it's just so true.

And now, with Arkham Origins hitting shelves later this year, Arkham City has another foe to face against. Instead of following on from City's conclusion and choosing to detail Batman's early adventures, Origins could go one of two ways: it could be a complete disappointment, which is unlikely, or it could knock City off its pedestal as the ultimate game centred on the Caped Crusader. When the game comes out this October, a comparison between Origin and City could yield interesting results but for now, whilst everyone counts down the days to the game's release, it's more than acceptable to state that Arkham City is a masterpiece and will, at least until the next generation hits, remain so. Well done, Rocksteady. Well done.

Adam Woodward

BATMAN ARKHAM: CITY - A FIRST HOUR, FIRST IMPRESSION

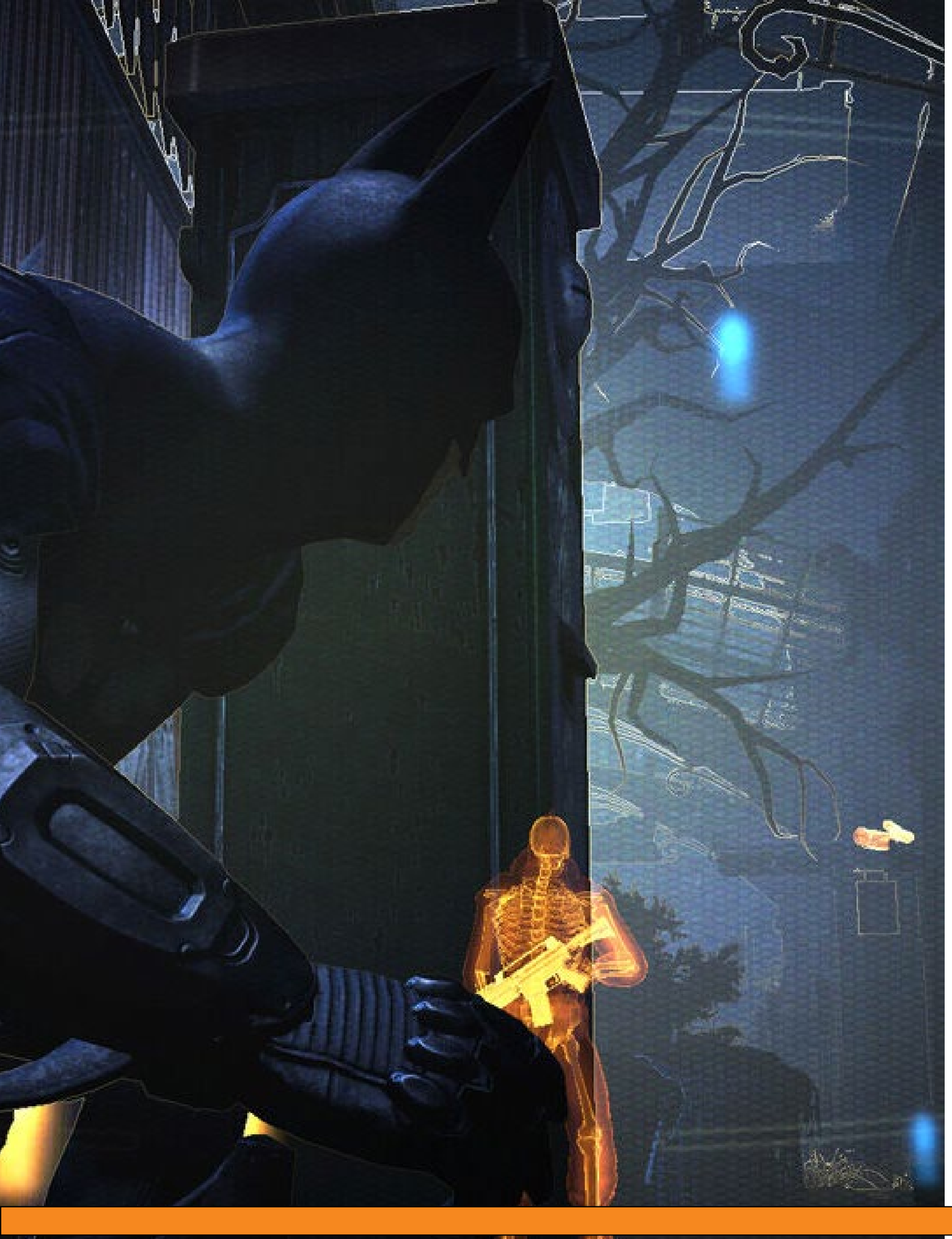
I've never played any Batman games. "What kind of a gamer are you?!" - I'll have you know I'm an excellent one, just never got round to it. Same as I haven't played any BioShock or Resident Evil games. Alright, I'll stop before I drop any last shred of credibility because the day has come; Batman has been experienced and I quite liked it.

With the forthcoming release of the third Batman title in the Arkham series, I thought it was time to at least experience one of the games for myself after hearing so much good about them. I felt no better option than to play the most recent game.

After getting the 'Game of the Year' edition for the PC at an absolute steal (£5.24, around $8), filled with all the DLC, including extra side-missions and characters, I picked myself up an official wired Xbox controller, downloaded and installed the mammoth 18GB game. I had a bit of trouble setting the game up to play, as Games for Windows Live didn't want to play ball at first, meaning I couldn't save the game originally, but once that was sorted I got to playing. I decided to do an hour rundown of how I thought the game was - a first impression. Having played literally zero Batman, I thought it would be interesting to see how it goes.

2 mins - This isn't Batman, it's Catwoman! What kind of...
3 mins - Ooh, nice smooth combat. Like it, like it.
3 mins - There's Batman! Oh wait, he's been taken. Rats.
4 mins - How dare anyone interrupt a news reporter whilst filming a piece to camera! That's just uncool man, uncool.
4 mins - Certainly a darker game that I was expecting. I like the atmosphere though, well told story, nicely strung along in the early stages.
5 mins - Hugo Strange certainly lives up to his name.
5 mins - I don't fancy being called a bitch, I'm Batman don'tcha know! Oh, I guess you don't. Just some billionaire to you.
6 mins - Why am I still wearing a suit in prison?
7 mins - I enjoy these 'walking' cutscenes. Makes you feel like you are part of a movie.
8 mins - Some prison they are running here.
8 mins - Penguin is awfully unattractive.
10 mins - Very similar combat to Assassin's Creed. Fluid and smart movement and attacks. Arguably more impressive as it's essentially unarmed combat.
11 mins - That was the easiest prison escape I've ever achieved!

12 mins - Good level conveyance, describing the objective with points to specific buildings.
13 mins - Fun building scaling and maneuvering.
14 mins - Time to suit up - I'm Batman.
15 mins - Stunning landscapes, I hope this looks as good



on consoles as it does on PC.
17 mins - Music in fight scenes needs more something-something. Not enough pace in the tunes for the level and pace of combat.
20 mins - Two-face isn't gifted in the looks department either - starting to sense a theme here with the enemies.
22 mins - Catwoman is too obviously being a slut
23 mins - Enjoying the thrown-object counter move. Catch, throw back, boom.
25 mins - A lot of obligatory millionaire tech.
30 mins - Many different characters come into play very early on, starting to get a little confusing.
35 mins - Nice to know there's plenty of dialogue to listen to throughout the game if you wish to do so.
38 mins - Not clear what the green 'Q's are around the map. Possible clues for missions later in the game?
43 mins - Parts of the HUD aren't explained. Little frustrating.
50 mins - Too much going on! Very confusing audio and HUD. Trying to move to one mission but experiencing a lot of radio traffic that doesn't seem to be related. Also, characters talking over other characters.

Batman: Arkham City is a very likeable game in general. It plays well in terms of movement, combat and story progression. The side missions and variety of mission elements, such as evidence scanning and investigation parts, invite me to play more if given the chance. It's easy to see why the modern Arkham games are liked as a series - the dark setting and playability appeals to both the keen gamer and lover of the Batman comics and franchise. I expect no less quality in the latest game, out soon.

James Bralant

Gadget Tip

Line Launcher

The Line Launcher is used to rapidly move horizontally across areas. While riding the Line Launcher, Batman can aim in a new direction and fire this again to change direction without dropping to the ground. Offensively, this gadget can also be used to take down unaware enemies by moving above them and dropping down to take them out in one move. However, this powerful move will alert nearby enemies.

INTERVIEW WITH BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS DIRECTOR, ERIC HOLMES

GameOn: In the demo we saw a new bad guy, tell us a bit about him?

Eric Holmes: At gamescom we revealed the new assassin, Firefly, for the first time. He's someone we're pretty excited to be designing in Batman: Arkham Origins, he's one of the more physically exotic characters, so we had to design a flight suit, a realistic jetpack and a flamethrower weapon for him. We're really proud of the results, we think we've got a really cool version of that character. There have been a bunch of more quirkier versions of him, but we're pretty happy with what we've got. What we've showcased at gamescom is a reflection of his persona. At the occasion we've revealed he's dominated the scene - he's set off a bunch of explosives all across the bride, and he's threatening to collapse the whole thing and kill everyone on the bridge, including all the police officers and his own men. So Batman sneaks through the police perimeter against the wishes of the police that are there to face down Firefly. We see a very pyrotechnics and 'Michael Bay' version of the bridge with chunks of it being blown apart. Batman facing Firefly is a big, explosive battle.

So you mentioned Batman had to sneak past the police, why is that? Are the police not on Batman's side?

That's right, at this point in the timeline Arkham Origins takes place early in the Batman timeline, he's only been Batman for two years and so right now he's no friend to the police, the police commissioner is a bad man; he's not a good man, a good cop like James Gordon who's currently captain.

Well, it sounds like Batman has a lot to go up against, especially on his own without any backup so how is he going to take down all these new bad guys? Does he have any new toys in his arsenal? Has the combat been revamped from in the previous entries in the series?

Absolutely! We have a bunch of new gadgets we are adding: Shock Gloves which is something we revealed here at gamescom which are a pair of electrically charged gloves that Batman has, as he's fighting the enemies they charge up and eventually when they're fully charged he can unleash them and start to devastating attacks like punch through armour and shields and if he hits an enemy with stun batons they're likely to flip over, if an enemy with a stun baton swipes at him he can counter and recharge the gloves from them. So we have a whole bunch of devastating attacks that will help clean up dangerous encounters very quickly. Another thing we've added, a gadget called a Bat Claw, fires a projectile that attaches to its first target and then it shoots a bat claw to a second target and pulls them together so you can use it to smash enemies together or hurl objects at enemies or attach it between two gargoyles, swing from it and takedown enemies.

So, we've seen the new antagonist in Deathstroke and seen some of his abilities. What do we have in terms of playable characters other than Batman?

One of the fan favourite characters from the game is Deathstroke himself and we are showing here at gamescom playable Deathstroke who will be a pre-order incentive so if you pre-order Batman: Arkham Origins you get Deathstroke and you also get new challenge maps whereby you can use his fighting style, gadgets and abilities and you'll fight a hundred enemies so a very high end challenge map with various enemies including ninjas.

How does Deathstroke compare to Batman?

Well, he has his own unique set of gadgets but probably his most distinctive thing is he uses his staff, he's very similar to batman in speed and abilities. Another thing is he has regenerative abilities so he can regenerate his health during a fight if he hasn't taken a hit for a while his health starts going back up again.

BATMAN: ARKHAM - SETTINGS

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Arkham Asylum is one of the most iconic locations in comic book lore. The psychiatric hospital has been the backdrop for countless Batman adventures as well as the home for many of his legendary villains. This made it the perfect setting for London-based Rocksteady Studios' debut action title featuring the Caped Crusader.

For a game set entirely in one location, there is a great deal of variety to the environments in Arkham Asylum. Whether exploring Intensive Treatment's claustrophobic corridors, the overgrown Botanical Gardens or the dingy Underground Sewers, each area feels unique and, most importantly, believable. This sense of authenticity is mainly due to the staggering amount of detail that was put into the world, with each scene containing dozens of easter eggs, riddles, and other elements that fill in the history of Arkham Asylum and its inhabitants.

While most of Arkham Asylum's action takes place inside the complex's various buildings, these locations are connected by open grounds that come with their own set of challenges such as sniper inmates and mutated plant pods. Since the entire game takes place over the course of one night, outdoor areas are just as dreary as the interiors, resulting in a dark and gloomy atmosphere that is perfectly Batman.

Batman: Arkham City

The level of quality achieved by Rocksteady's portrayal of the asylum, both visually and in terms of level design, is highly commendable. But having already created such a perfect and complete rendition of Arkham Asylum, the question remained - where do you set the sequel? The series' intricate level design and enclosed stealth arenas put a totally open city, à la Spider-man 2, out of the question, but there simply aren't any other locations in Batman's mythos that offer the same scale and variety of Arkham Island. In the end, Rocksteady contrived a middle ground between the two: a cordoned-off

section of Gotham's slums built to hold inmates of the decidedly inadequate Arkham Asylum and Blackgate Penitentiary.

The area - known as Arkham City - was a drastic change from what was on offer in the first game: open areas of land with just a few scattered buildings were replaced by sprawling city streets and towering skyscrapers. Fans expecting a location on par with GTA IV will be disappointed though, as the place is still a prison - there are no pedestrians going about their daily business, and it can take less than a few minutes to get from one side of the world to the other.

As a result of the added verticality of a city, there is a very different dynamic to navigating the environment. Building on the basic, descent-slowing glide from Batman: Arkham Asylum, Bats is given the ability to dive bomb, pulling up at the last moment and using the

Gadget Tip

Freeze Blast

Deployed to cause an ice-based explosion that will freeze an enemy in position for an extended period of time. This can be used effectively in combat situations. Additionally, the Freeze Blast is powerful enough to freeze water of any temperature, creating a temporary platform capable of supporting Batman's weight.

speed to gain extra height when gliding. Batman's grapple hook is also given a boost upgrade, allowing him to launch into the air after a grapple and continue gliding.

Combining these movement mechanics makes getting around Arkham City a breeze, but they also mean you'll spend most of your time flying through the sky and jumping from rooftop to rooftop. Impressively, the game's setting is just as detailed as its predecessor, but the majority of the easter eggs, such as Crime Alley and Flying Graysons posters, are at street-level, meaning they will be missed by many players.

Batman: Arkham Origins

Very few games have attempted to include an accurate open world portrayal of Gotham City, and arguably none have achieved this goal. However, this seems to be the aim of Warner Bros. Games Montréal, who are at the helm of the new prequel to the series. Gone are the walls enclosing Old Gotham, the slums that will eventually become Arkham City. Now Batman is given free roam over the whole area from the previous title as well as the upmarket New Gotham, an entirely new section. With the world size effectively doubled, the developers have their work cut out if they want to achieve the same level of detail seen in the first two games.

The fact that Batman: Arkham Origins is a prequel means that there will likely be a different feel to the city: we will be seeing Gotham at the height of its power, before being walled off and torn apart by its low life criminals. However, since the game's events occur on the night of Christmas Eve, expect the city to have the same desolate atmosphere that exuded from the first two games.

In developing the next Arkham game, Warner Bros. Games Montréal have the challenge of taking on one of the most highly acclaimed franchises of this generation. But thanks to the groundwork laid down by Rocksteady in Batman: Arkham City as well as the new area of New Gotham, there's a good chance we'll get to play around in the biggest, most realistic depiction of Gotham City yet.

Matt Girdler

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THE BADDIES OF BATMAN

*Superheroes; everyone wants to be one - or saved by one*insert typical swooning here*. But, in this article we're going to spin around and appreciate the villains, the bad guys, the crooks, the nasties; whatever you call them, the world of the superhero wouldn't exist without them. Gotham's black knight has experienced his fair share of nutjobs who've been out to either get him directly for their own seething revenge, or to attack Gotham City and its civilians with a crazy idea thought up during a month of "bad guy PMT."*

Having been born from the comic book world, Batman has quickly risen to become one of the most loved superheroes of the last 74 years, fighting through a variety of criminal masterminds with the aim to keep his beloved Gotham City safe from the gangs who roam the streets. The villains paying him visits thick and fast, including the most famous one of all, The Joker - a supervillain whose stories of origin vary across the wide variety of media in which he is presented, but always with the same typical style - the green haired, white faced, red lipped psycho who loves nothing more than to get on "Bat's" good side and knows exactly which buttons to press.

Over the last two games that have been released in the Arkham franchise to date, 'Batman: Arkham Asylum' and 'Batman: Arkham City', there has been a focus on the Joker as the main supervillain for Batman to face off against. Others feature, showing their own traits and personalities as you play through the game; such as The Riddler and his trophies which are collected during game play by completing certain puzzles that have been left for you - one of the features of the game which I personally became hooked upon attempting to gather to 100% completion. There's still one alluding me, though I've sworn myself to not cheat so it may forever stay as unknown, my personal "supervillain".

With the success of the two previous games it came as no surprise that the publishers of the Batman: Arkham series have announced they wanted to further expand the cast of enemies and have brought a few of the fan's favourites back in the upcoming new game; Arkham Origins. Much like its predecessor, Arkham Origins is set to have one focused 'main' enemy and a string of sub-stories, riddles and adventures for the player to experience throughout their game play, one of which being the fantastically evil Mad Hatter, aka Jarvis Tech. We'd previously encountered the mad man back in Arkham City during a mind altering experience which left the player desiring more and thanks to regular feedback on their Facebook and Twitter pages, Warner Bros. Montreal have listened to the fans and brought us exactly what we desired - side missions based around chasing a rabbit through Arkham. Though there's been no further insight as to what we can expect from Tech, anyone who has played through the encounter will be aware the experience is not one that is forgotten any time soon.

Touching upon new enemies is only part of the upcoming Arkham Origins, however, as well as the introduction of Deathstroke, Copperhead and Black Mask (to name but a few) there are also some old faces - Penguin and Bane making their come back again to seek revenge against Batman for their own enjoyment. The Arkham games have yet to fail with their decisions on the enemies faced by Batman and Arkham Origins isn't looking to be set out to fail any time soon either. From studying the trailers alone fans and gamers alike can see the unique experience each and every enemy will offer, from simple combat to advanced stealth, gadget use and technique. With a mixture of riddles and mind tricks by the Mad Hatter and a good ol' fisty cuff with Bane and Deathstroke, Arkham Origins is set to be another huge success for Batman and his trusty gadgets. Let's just hope this time around there's no sneaky trophy that seems to allude me at every turn.

Heather Cook

Gadget Tip

Smoke Pellet

The Smoke Pellet floods an area with disorientating smoke, allowing Batman to safely escape while under fire. Additionally, if a group of enemies are targeted with the Smoke Pellet they can then be taken down silently during the confusion. When used in combat, enemies will panic and attack wildly, often hitting each other. Requires a recharge time after use.

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS E3 PREVIEW

Platforms: PC. Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U
Date: October 2013
Genre: Action-adventure, beat 'em up
Publisher: Warner Bros.
Interactive Entertainment

The Batman: Arkham series is unquestionably one of the biggest success stories of this generation. Developer Rocksteady Studios' clear reverence for the source material and an innovative approach to combat meant that 2009's Batman: Arkham Asylum was met with critical praise and healthy sales. Batman: Arkham City cemented the series' position as a modern classic with some of the best review scores ever seen. However, it was not immediately clear where a sequel would take the Dark Knight.

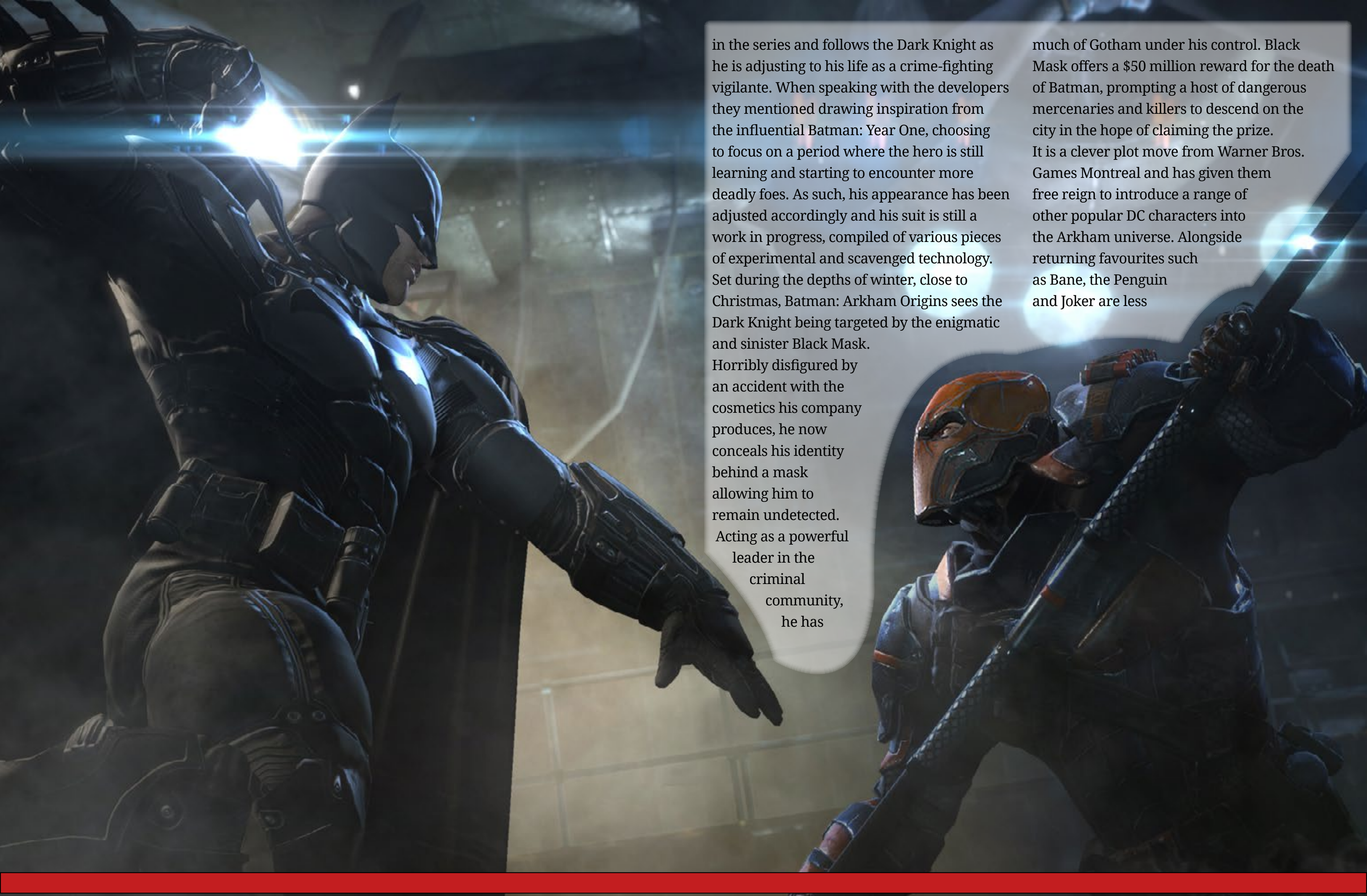
Tackling the age-old problem of the tricky three-quel, Batman: Arkham Origins sticks to convention and moves the story back in time to form a precursor to the first title. Initially we were disappointed with this revelation, expecting the franchise to continue its forward momentum onto even bigger and better things. Equally, the departure of Rocksteady Studios also raised concerns as their understanding and handling of Batman as a character and a property was particularly careful and astute. Recently, we got the opportunity to spend some hands-on time with the game and found, thankfully, that little has been done to deviate away from the established Arkham formula. Replacing the original developers is Canadian studio Warner Bros. Games Montreal and there is no question that expectations are high. Further significant changes are the departures of other key Arkham figures including notable voice actors Kevin Conroy and Mark Hamill as Batman and Joker respectively. Paul Dini, the writer of the previous instalments, was also jettisoned for a new team with additional support from figures at DC Comics.

It seems that Warner Bros. were keen to inject some new blood into the series and when we sat down we were surprised to find that little seems to have substantially changed in gameplay terms. We jumped straight onto the streets of Gotham as snow lined the streets and decorations littered the sidewalks and rooftops. However, far from a tranquil winter, the city is as dangerous as ever thanks to the work of several new villains operating in the urban sprawl. Batman: Arkham Origins takes place roughly five years before the events of the first game

Gadget Tip

REC (Remote Electrical Charge)

The Remote Electrical Charge provides electricity to powered down generators and electromagnets. Additionally, it can be fired at enemies to administer a localised, non-lethal, electric shock. This is particularly effective against armoured assailants.



in the series and follows the Dark Knight as he is adjusting to his life as a crime-fighting vigilante. When speaking with the developers they mentioned drawing inspiration from the influential Batman: Year One, choosing to focus on a period where the hero is still learning and starting to encounter more deadly foes. As such, his appearance has been adjusted accordingly and his suit is still a work in progress, compiled of various pieces of experimental and scavenged technology.

Set during the depths of winter, close to Christmas, Batman: Arkham Origins sees the Dark Knight being targeted by the enigmatic and sinister Black Mask.

Horribly disfigured by an accident with the cosmetics his company produces, he now conceals his identity behind a mask allowing him to remain undetected.

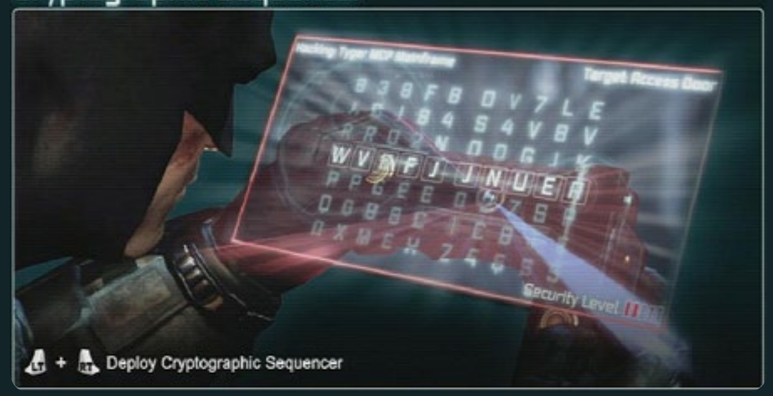
Acting as a powerful leader in the criminal community, he has much of Gotham under his control. Black Mask offers a $50 million reward for the death of Batman, prompting a host of dangerous mercenaries and killers to descend on the city in the hope of claiming the prize.

It is a clever plot move from Warner Bros. Games Montreal and has given them free reign to introduce a range of other popular DC characters into the Arkham universe. Alongside returning favourites such as Bane, the Penguin and Joker are less

mainstream figures including Deadshot, Anarky, Copperhead and the Mad Hatter. These villains are set to provide substantial challenge and add a new degree of menace to Batman's early career. Choosing Black Mask as the primary antagonist is a clever move, not only does his veiled persona mirror the Dark Knight's, but his less prominent reputation gives the developers greater freedom to move the plot in new directions. Sadly, our hands-on time with the game was incredibly light on plot details and we were not able to get an impression of any of the new voice cast or any greater insight into the narrative. Instead, we began stalking the streets of Gotham in search of criminals who needed bringing to justice. Spotting a patrolling gang of ominous looking thugs, we used Batman's grapple to get into position above them and size up the crowd. Black Mask's plan has raised criminal activity in the city, overwhelming police and necessitating the Dark Knight's involvement. Dropping in on the gang we were pleased to see that combat was still fresh, crisp and responsive. Chaining moves together and evading attacks feels like second nature almost instantaneously. If anything, the combat felt tighter than Batman: Arkham City and a nearby developer assured us only minor changes have been implemented but they certainly seemed to show. However, fundamentally nothing strikingly new was immediately obvious. It took us a few brawls to encounter the two new enemies the developer's have added: the Martial Artist and the Armoured Lieutenant. The Martial Artist was able to block, evade and counter attacks and proved to be a fairly challenging opponent when encountered in a larger group. In one rooftop dust-up we were faced with several at once and had to use a lot of dodges and fast attacks to beat them. The Armoured Lieutenant was another relatively daunting prospect but after one or two encounters proved fairly straightforward to dispatch. Covered in a thick layer of body armour and usually surrounded by a squad of, usually armed, minions; he is invincible until his shielding is removed. By stunning him and removing the armour in the dazed state, he can then be defeated. The main challenge was removing his surrounding guard while avoiding his slow but high damage attacks. Neither new opponent seemed to make a huge difference to combat in the brief time we had with the game, which was something of a surprise. Warner Bros. Games Montreal may have been worried about damaging the balance of the game but it seems more likely that these new additions will be scaled and introduced with greater frequency

Gadget Tip

Cryptographic Sequencer



The Cryptographic Sequencer is used to hack into security consoles and unlock access to secure areas. After recovering an encryption key, the Sequencer enables Batman to lock on to secure radio broadcasts which are subsequently stored, tracked and played back by the Batcomputer.

as the title progresses. It would have been interesting to see how dangerous these enemies were in larger numbers or more confined areas, but we are hoping they will make more of an impact than in this preview.
While roaming the streets Batman's Cryptographic Sequencer pointed to two main types of side mission. The first, Crimes in Progress, involved Batman reaching a specific location around Gotham and encountering Black Mask's forces. We foiled a bank robbery, with a group of tough enemies including Armoured Lieutenant.
It felt natural and fitted in perfectly with the story and feel of the game without appearing to be a jarring additional mission.
Similarly, while flitting across rooftops we discovered a Most Wanted mission. Here Anarky has planted a series of bombs across the city, which must be diffused using the Cryptographic Sequencer within a specific time limit. The chase across the rooftops to the critical point was fairly intense and required Batman to defeat a number of enemies before the bomb could be disabled. What was rather unclear was the rewards and benefits of completing these side quests, but there are many located throughout the city.
Our Cryptographic Sequencer directed us to the smouldering wreckage of a crashed helicopter outside a large building. Here, another new gameplay element was introduced: reconstructing crime scenes.
Using Batman's detective abilities and the Cryptographic Sequencer, it is possible to solve various crime scenes scattered throughout Gotham. After examining various pieces of the wreckage and surrounding buildings, we were able to create an interactive reconstruction of the crash itself.
A timeline option becomes available, allowing Batman to move throughout the sequence of events as they happened, displayed in game as a translucent holograph. Spotting something suspicious before the crash happened; we paused the recreation and climbed to the top of a building. Slowly playing the events, we were in a perfect position to see a sniper shot hit the chopper identifying the cause of the crash. Again, pausing the reconstruction, we could see where the shot came from and follow it to a nearby building and another crime scene.
This seems like one of the biggest additions to the game and it seems likely that several puzzles will utilise these mechanics. The use of the Cryptographic Sequencer to scan and move around in the timeline was very straightforward and it felt like a natural addition to the other puzzles present in the earlier games. It was also a great way to provide variation to the gameplay and help break up the combat with a meatier and more time-consuming challenge.
Our gameplay demonstration came to a close with a chance to use the Dark Knight's stealth abilities. Entering into the lobby of a hotel, a group of guards patrolled. Using the grapple to ascend into the darkness above we used Batman's abilities to pick them off one by one. One new addition was the Remote Claw, which provided some sadistic fun to knocking enemies unconscious. This allows two objects (or unwitting opponents) to be tethered together sending them flying into one another. Initially it seemed to be a situational weapon but its ability to take out two enemies was very useful.
As so much of the Arkham series rests on the switch between stealth and combat, it was pleasing to see this fine balance retained and developed with a few subtle additions. While some critics may be disappointed at the lack of innovation and evolution of the gameplay, fans will no doubt be relishing the chance to clear up the streets of Gotham once again.
Despite the absence of many new single-player features, the story is one of the biggest selling points to Batman: Arkham Origins with a dark and complex tale promised.
There is clearly a lot more still to learn about this entry into the series, with a multiplayer mode being recently announced. Being separately developed by Splash Damage, the multiplayer component will see up to eight players fighting it out online with some taking on the role of Batman and Robin, with the remainder acting as Bane or Joker's henchman. It is an interesting prospect and we are hoping to get our hands on it soon to try it for ourselves.

Chris Wakefield

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

Batman
First Appearance: Detective Comics #27 (1939)

The caped crusader arguably has the richest history of any superhero and if he had aged like the rest of us mortals, he'd sure have some stories to tell to the folks at the care home. To detail Batman's entire crime-fighting history would require a giant tome's worth of writing, so for the sake of your attention span and our fingers, we'll keep it short and sweet.

Created by Bob Kane and Bill Finger, Bruce Wayne is a billionaire playboy who was traumatised as a young lad when he witnessed the murder of his parents. Subsequently swearing revenge and reinforced with an unbending sense of justice, Bruce trains himself to peak physical and mental condition and dons the iconic suit.

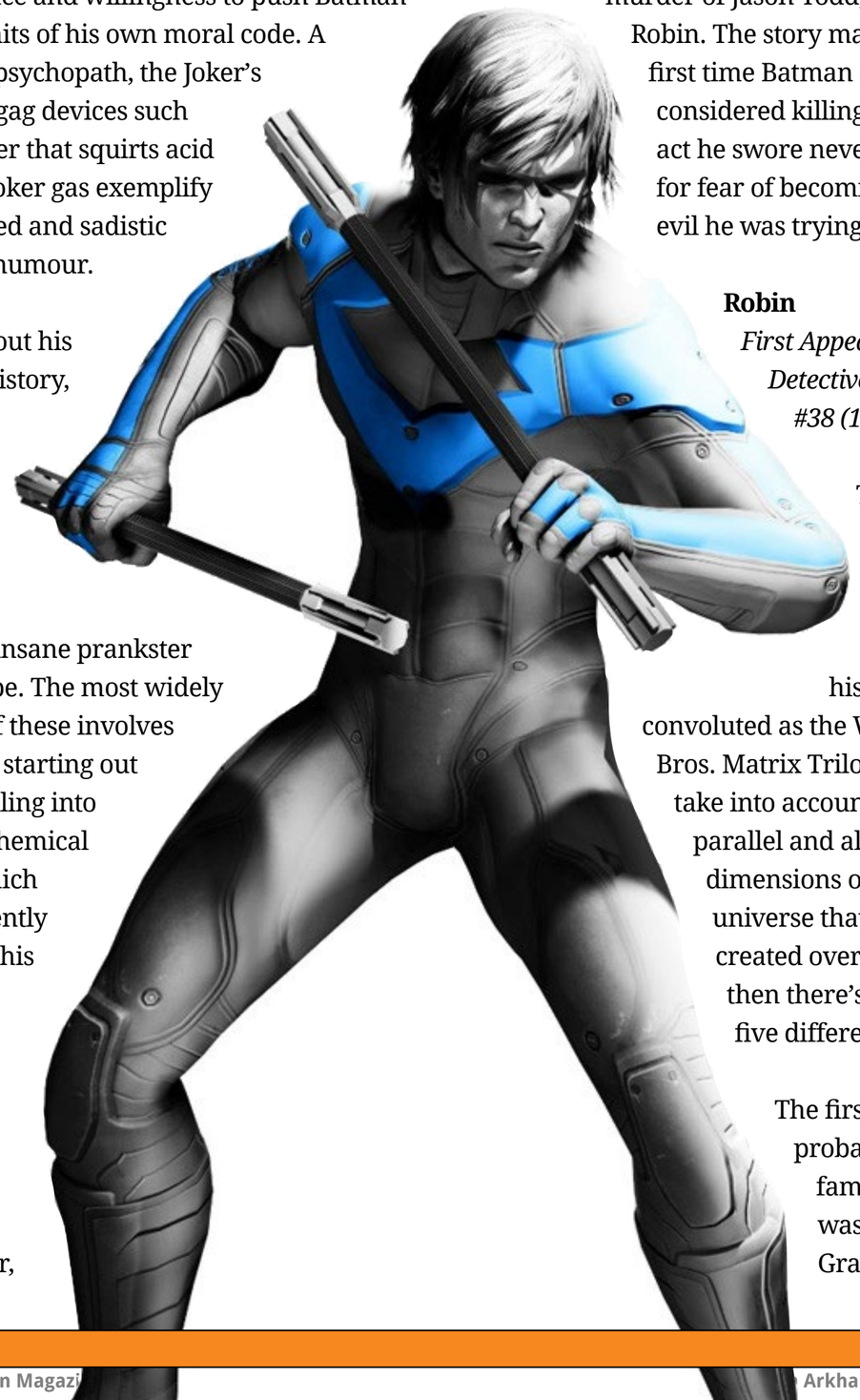
Making base in his Batcave on the outskirts of Gotham City, the Dark Knight spends the majority of his time apprehending the mentally unstable members of his famous 'Rogue's Gallery'. The Joker, Scarecrow, Bane and the Riddler are just a small sample of the kind of depravity Batman must face on a regular basis, so it's a good job he has help. The still divisive boy wonder; Robin, remains Batman's most famous ally, but others such as Batgirl, Commissioner Gordon, Alfred and the anti-hero, Catwoman all support Mr. Wayne when he dons the cape and cowl.

Although he has no super powers, Batman is still regarded to be one of the greatest superheroes ever created. With the combination of his intellect, detective skills and steely will, Batman is truly a force to be reckoned with.

The Joker
First Appearance: Batman #1 (1940)

Batman's greatest enemy and arguably one of the most iconic villains ever created, The Joker is a severely depraved individual who has taken up the mantle of being the Yin to Batman's Yang. Like Batman, the Joker doesn't possess superpowers but instead relies on his high intelligence and willingness to push Batman to the limits of his own moral code. A genuine psychopath, the Joker's range of gag devices such as a flower that squirts acid and his Joker gas exemplify his warped and sadistic sense of humour.

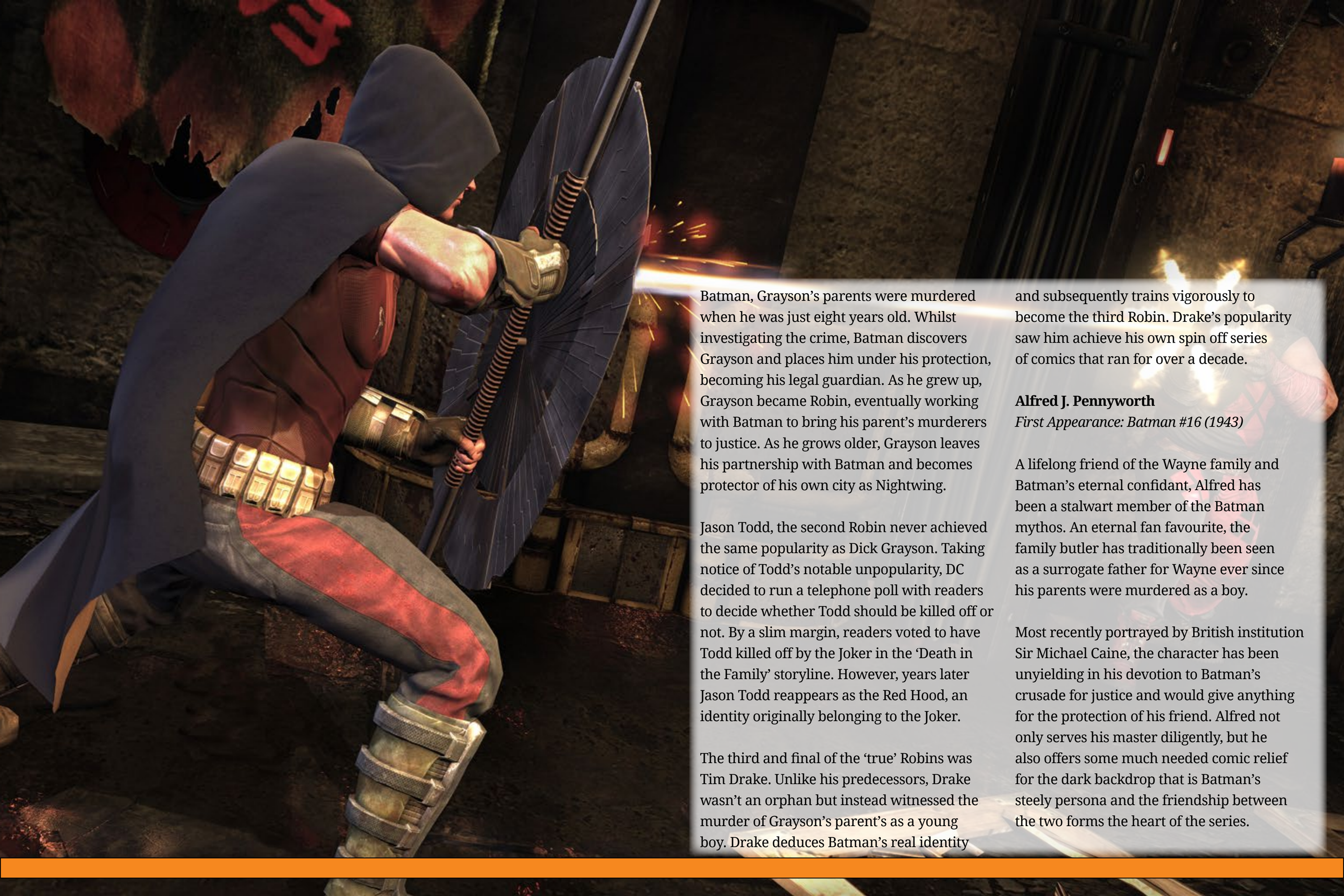
Throughout his prolific history, multiple origin stories have been given for how the insane prankster came to be. The most widely known of these involves the Joker starting out life by falling into a vat of chemical waste which subsequently bleaches his skin and turns his hair green. Upon seeing his new makeover, he goes insane, becoming the famous super villain.
There's been countless stories involving the two titans but perhaps the most famous is the murder of Jason Todd, the second Robin. The story marked the first time Batman seriously considered killing the Joker, an act he swore never to commit for fear of becoming the very evil he was trying to fight.



Robin
First Appearance: Detective Comics #38 (1940)

The younger half of the Dynamic Duo, Robin's history is as convoluted as the Wachowski Bros. Matrix Trilogy. If you take into account all of the parallel and alternate dimensions of the DC universe that have been created over the years, then there's a whopping five different Robins.

The first and probably most famous Robin was Dick Grayson. Like



Batman, Grayson's parents were murdered when he was just eight years old. Whilst investigating the crime, Batman discovers Grayson and places him under his protection, becoming his legal guardian. As he grew up, Grayson became Robin, eventually working with Batman to bring his parent's murderers to justice. As he grows older, Grayson leaves his partnership with Batman and becomes protector of his own city as Nightwing.

Jason Todd, the second Robin never achieved the same popularity as Dick Grayson. Taking notice of Todd's notable unpopularity, DC decided to run a telephone poll with readers to decide whether Todd should be killed off or not. By a slim margin, readers voted to have Todd killed off by the Joker in the 'Death in the Family' storyline. However, years later Jason Todd reappears as the Red Hood, an identity originally belonging to the Joker.

The third and final of the 'true' Robins was Tim Drake. Unlike his predecessors, Drake wasn't an orphan but instead witnessed the murder of Grayson's parent's as a young boy. Drake deduces Batman's real identity and subsequently trains vigorously to become the third Robin. Drake's popularity saw him achieve his own spin off series of comics that ran for over a decade.

Alfred J. Pennyworth
First Appearance: Batman #16 (1943)

A lifelong friend of the Wayne family and Batman's eternal confidant, Alfred has been a stalwart member of the Batman mythos. An eternal fan favourite, the family butler has traditionally been seen as a surrogate father for Wayne ever since his parents were murdered as a boy.

Most recently portrayed by British institution Sir Michael Caine, the character has been unyielding in his devotion to Batman's crusade for justice and would give anything for the protection of his friend. Alfred not only serves his master diligently, but he also offers some much needed comic relief for the dark backdrop that is Batman's steely persona and the friendship between the two forms the heart of the series.

Catwoman
First Appearance: Batman #1 (1940)

Originally known as 'The Cat' in her first appearance, Catwoman is the quintessential femme fatale of the Batman universe. Enigmatic in her intentions, she has on numerous occasions been an ally and adversary of the Bat seemingly choosing to align herself on either side to suit her own goals.

Catwoman's origin story is actually rather complex. In her original appearance as the Cat, her real name was never revealed and the now instantly recognisable costume donned by Selina Kyle was yet to exist. Instead disguising herself as an old woman, Batman intentionally lets her escape from a heist by blocking Robin from apprehending her.

In the interim years before her current history was established, multiple occupations have been applied to the anti-heroine's real identity, ranging from flight attendant, teenage runaway to even working as a dominatrix.

A constant love interest of the Bat both in and out of costume, Kyle uses her cat alter ego to make a name for herself as a master thief. With super fast reflexes, apparel and weapons that you would find in an S&M store, Catwoman is a desirable ally and a dangerous foe. A fan favourite, Catwoman took a hiatus in the 1960s only to reappear better than ever.

Most recently portrayed by Anne Hathaway in The Dark Knight Rises, the character shows no sign of losing her following, so expect her to play an important role in Arkham Origins.

Black Mask
First Appearance: Batman #386 (1985)

A relatively young member of Batman's Rogue's Gallery, Black Mask's youth hasn't made him any less of an adversary for the Dark Knight. Black Mask, unlike most of Batman's enemies, has a personal reason to hate Bruce Wayne, and subsequently Batman.

Born into an extremely wealthy and vain family, Roman Sionis' parent's had little interest in their own son, preferring instead to elevate and maintain their social status among the elite of Gotham City. Although Roman's parents detested the Wayne family, their desire to stay in the upper echelons of society meant they continued to praise them in public despite their private disgust.

Roman eventually falls in love with a girl, Circe, who works for his father's company: Janus Cosmetics. Despite his affection for the girl, Roman's parents deem his partner to be of poor social stature, demanding he end the relationship. Enraged at his parent's vain sentiments, Roman burns down his parent's home, murders them and takes over the family business.

With little business acumen, the fledgling criminal runs the family business into the ground, which is subsequently rescued by Wayne enterprises. Humiliated and embarrassed, Roman refuses to blame himself and instead visits his parent's graves to desecrate them. Whilst there, Roman is struck by a lightning bolt and knocked out on a nearby headstone. Upon waking and seeing the event as an omen, Roman takes a piece of shattered stone and carves the material into a mask, marking the birth of the crime lord and Arkham Origin's main antagonist.

Joe Pring

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS MULTIPLAYER

'Tacked-on multiplayer' is a term that instills fear in the heart of many a gamer. Over the years, we've seen many established franchises develop multiplayer modes that are often regarded as unnecessary additions to the single-player campaign - acclaimed series such as Mass Effect, Tomb Raider, Assassin's Creed and BioShock have all attempted this transition, and to varying degrees of success. Now it would seem that it's Batman's turn to try.

Batman: Arkham Origins marks a new era for the franchise in more ways than one - we have a new developer taking the mantle, the chronology of the series is being shaken up, and now it has been announced that the game will have multiplayer. And not just any multiplayer - a new 3 vs. 3 vs. 2 mode that marks a bold attempt to blend third-person shooting mechanics with traditional Arkham gameplay.

3 vs. 3 vs. 2 - otherwise known as 'Invisible Predator Online' - is the first competitive mode announced, and will pit three thugs each from Bane and Joker's gangs against one another in a territorial dispute, while two players take up the mantle of Caped Crusader and Boy Wonder. The Dynamic Duo must keep to the shadows and perform stealth takedowns in order to intimidate both gangs into submission.

The villain teams have a limited number of respawns, but these can be increased by taking out either Batman or Robin. Hacking terminals - the main objective of the thug teams - also affects the number of reinforcements available to each gang. The stealth team, Batman and Robin, have their own objective. Performing various predator takedowns on unsuspecting enemies will fill up an 'intimidation bar' that, when filled, will cause the Joker and Bane to recall their thugs and end the war. Be warned, however, that using the same stealth moves repeatedly will fill the bar slower, so variation is key.

Bane and Joker's gang consist of 'Super-Villain Elite' thugs, and come with some enhanced abilities and gadgets that set them apart from enemies in the single-player. Bane and Joker give their gang things to use like EMP charges and drones that can be flown around the map to fire missiles. The weapons they use are an assortment of lethal guns and explosives, and each thug has an 'Enhanced Vision' that acts like an x-ray for a limited period of time on a rechargeable battery, but is easily scrambled.

Batman and Robin can use gadgets from past games, such as Batarangs, Explosive Gel, Smoke Pellets and the Grapple Gun. Combat options are similar to single-player, with the stealth team able to make use of floor grates and vents to ambush their enemies, or gargoyles to drop on the unsuspecting and perform glide kicks. For the sake of balance, however, these moves will not work if the thug is looking straight at the player. Both Batman and Robin have unlimited use of the 'Detective Mode' seen in previous games.

But it's not all thugs and capes. That would be too easy.

At any given moment during a match, team leaders can call in and demand to join the fray. A door on the map is highlighted, and thugs may drop what they're doing and race to it. Whoever gets there first plays as either Bane or the Joker, depending on their gang allegiance.

These special characters have only one life, but are by far the most powerful in the game. The Joker has an arsenal of much more powerful weapons, and his joy buzzer can be used as melee. Bane can hurl enemy thugs around the map and smash them into walls and other scenery, and if he gets ahold of Batman, he

Gadget Tip

Explosive Gel

A liquid explosive useful to temporarily incapacitate enemy targets, or explode through structural weaknesses. Up to three charges can be placed at any given time and these can be detonated simultaneously or independently. Features a built in proximity detector. Use the Quickfire Explosive Gel to seamlessly include this gadget during combat.

true) that indicated other villains would play a part in the multiplayer. Characters mentioned include: Killer Croc, Black Mask, Firefly, Deadshot, and Deathstroke. It's possible that these will appear in multiplayer modes that have not yet been announced.

breaks his back. I wonder whether the Joker kills Robin by pummelling him to death with a crowbar while Batman watches on...

It has been confirmed that there will be a customisation element to the multiplayer, and that upgrades such as new weapons, extra loadout slots, and outfit personalisation are available. Specific gadgets can be modified and upgraded, and there are various skins available, such as Tim Drake's Robin suit from Arkham City and a Batman skin from the animated series.

Dick Grayson is confirmed as the character behind Robin's mask. Anyone who's read Frank Miller's Batman: Year One - set in the same period as Arkham Origins - will tell you that this doesn't make sense. It's been justified, however, by the confirmation that Robin is a multiplayer exclusive character and will not show up in the single-player campaign.

Though unconfirmed, Kotaku published a list of rumours in April (many of which have come

Already there is much scepticism across the internet as to the necessity of a multiplayer mode in an Arkham game. With new developers in charge, it's understandable that people don't want such a fantastic series to be ruined, and the last outing of British developer Splash Damage (the team tasked with designing the multiplayer) was 2011's rather underwhelming Brink.

That said, I think the multiplayer is shaping up very nicely indeed. There are a lot of new and interesting ideas to be seen here, a lot of unique content that I believe will really make good use of the Arkham series' framework. And I can't help but find the allure of dangling my friends upside down from gargoyles very enticing indeed.

Batman: Arkham Origins' multiplayer will be available at release on the 25th of October, for the PS3, Xbox 360 and PC worldwide. The Wii U version won't include multiplayer.

Thom Whyte

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS GAMESCOM PREVIEW

Platforms: PC. Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U
Date: October 2013
Genre: Action-adventure, beat 'em up
Publisher: Warner Bros.
Interactive Entertainment

At gamescom 2013 we got to see some new content for the upcoming Batman: Arkham Origins. Our recent hands-on preview from E3 2013 provided most everything you need to know about the title, but we would be remiss if we didn't fill you in on all the latest updates from our most recent experience.

One of the principle announcements from the latest demonstration was the reveal of a new antagonist in the game, one of the eight elite assassins who are hunting down Batman on Christmas Eve in Gotham City. This new addition to the roster is Firefly, a pyromaniac costumed criminal who wields a flamethrower and takes to the air using his jetpack.

In the gamescom demonstration, Batman was struggling in a race against time to disarm several bombs that Firefly had planted on Gotham Bridge, which links the city's two islands together. The police were en-route to the scene, but if they arrived before Batman's task was done then Firefly would manually destroy the bridge.

We didn't see the police in the demo, nor are we sure what part the police department will play in proceedings. What we do know is that the plot of Origins is set prior to

two Arkham games. However, we did get to see one new gadget in action - the Shock Gloves.

Used primarily in a combat role, the Shock Gloves provide Batman with an electrical boost that has several different effects on the way he fights. Firstly, and most obviously, his electrically charged attacks do more damage than his standard melee moves. The shock gloves also allow him to bypass enemy shields easily, and defend himself against electricity-based enemy attacks. By countering the moves of thugs wielding stun sticks, Batman can even recharge the Shock Gloves mid-combat.

Jim Gordon becoming Commissioner, and that at the beginning of the game Batman is a wanted vigilante, being pursued by the police like any other high-profile criminal. It is not unreasonable speculation then to assume that Batman may have to avoid or even fight against the police forces during the course of the game.

As Batman progressed through the demo we got to see various stealth and combat sections unfold. As reported in our E3 preview, these elements remain mostly unchanged from the tried and tested formula established by Rocksteady in the previous

Although primarily a combat gadget, the Shock Gloves were demonstrated to have other uses that will benefit exploration and puzzle solving - namely the ability to restore power to uncharged electrical devices and machinery.

We also saw some more footage of the Remote Claw in action, which Batman uses to target two objects and pull them towards each other. Used in combat, this gadget causes two targeted enemies to smash into each other, or can be used to propel an object towards an enemy. The Remote Claw was also used to solve several environmental puzzles, and to create a wire walkway that Batman can use to reach out-of-the-way locations or set ambushes.
At the end of the demonstration we saw Batman confront Firefly and, upon hitting him with his Grapnel Gun, he was dragged through the air in a short scene which left him battered and bruised. The demo faded out before combat could begin, but it was clear that Firefly is going to be no pushover and that a substantive boss battle is likely.

Also shown at gamescom was an exclusive DLC bonus available to players who pre-order Batman: Arkham Origins. This additional content features an extra challenge map, in which a player-controlled Deathstroke will face off against 100 enemies in an effort to defeat them all whilst scoring the maximum possible points.

This section was playable and a brief hands-on with Deathstroke revealed him to be a slightly different combatant in terms of style; overall feeling slightly slower, but slightly harder hitting than Batman. He also comes equipped with his Power Staff and a number of unique gadgets to assist him in combat, as well as regenerative abilities that will almost certainly come in handy when facing off against 100 opponents.

Once again the highlighting factor in the gamescom presentation, as with the E3 experience, is that Warner Bros. Montreal are very much taking their cues from the previous entries in the series and not overly complicating the formula for Batman: Arkham Origins with sweeping changes. However, the new gadgets and new enemies will certainly go some ways to refreshing the experience and adding a little something extra. There is still more to learn and with new information slowly trickling out as we approach the October release date, we are very much looking forward to the next tidbit being revealed.

Chris Wakefield

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS BLACKGATE PREVIEW

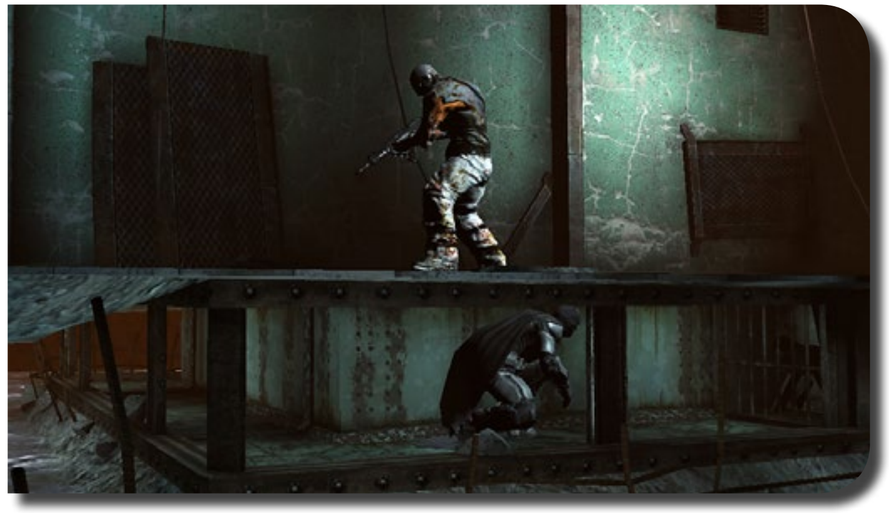
Platforms: PS Vita, 3DS
Date: October 2013
Genre: Action-adventure, beat 'em up
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment

At gamescom 2013 we got the chance to have a brief hands-on experience with the PlayStation Vita version of Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate, which will be releasing this October on both the Vita and the 3DS.

Blackgate will take place shortly after the events of the upcoming Arkham Origins, and be centred around Batman investigating a disturbance around Blackgate prison. Little was revealed in terms of plot details, except that the Penguin will feature as an antagonist and that the game will feature Batman's first meeting with Catwoman.

The most obvious change in the gameplay is the transition from a full 3D environment to a "2.5D" side-scroller. Inevitably this has a significant impact on the overall experience, yet despite such a sweeping change (driven most likely by the 3DS' lack of a second analog stick) the gameplay demo we enjoyed was still distinctly Arkham-esque in feel.

Combat in particular feels remarkably similar, despite the transition away from the 3D environments. Batman's repertoire of moves still revolves around fast-moving dodges, combos, stuns and counter-moves. The flow and intuition present in the Arkham series is



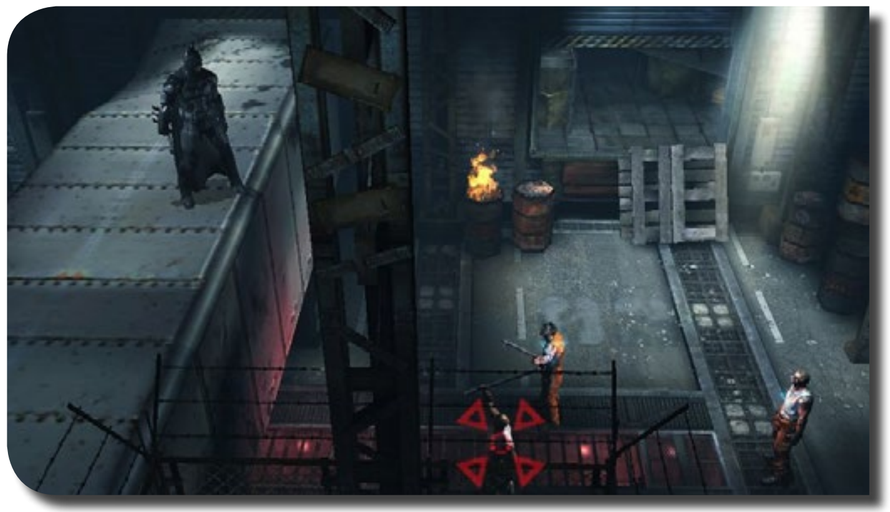
still (based on our short time with the game) present in this title, and players familiar with the franchise will have no trouble in picking this up and fighting like a pro.

Batman's gadgets will also make an appearance and can be found scattered throughout the game. Our demo was, presumably, set in the early part of the game and our inventory limited; but we had the Grapnel Gun allowing us access to out-of-the-way locations and the ability to tear open hard to reach air vents.

We also enjoyed the cut scene sections, which in Blackgate are presented as in a comic board style as opposed to full-motion cinematics. While this steps away from the style of the home console series, they were well designed and injected a fresh sense of style to proceedings that made this iteration stand out from its peers.

Of course, a significant effect of the move away from the 3D environment is the loss of a fully open, explorable environment and, if the short section we played is any indication, Blackgate will play very much as a linear experience. It's a lamentable loss, as a significant part of the Arkham experience was tied into the exploration and discovery element (Riddler trophies anyone?). Blackgate attempts to alleviate this loss by introducing several hidden locations to find. It's not the same, but it's a nod in the right direction.

To assist you in finding these hidden locations, and in solving the various puzzles throughout the game, detective mode makes a welcome



return; and in one of the best uses of the PlayStation Vita's touch screen technology we have experienced in our time with the system.

Detective mode is activated simply by touching your finger against the screen, and dragging it over the environment highlights points of interest in a fairly generous radius around the digit. Hovering directly over one of these points opens an on-screen text box displaying useful information about the object highlighted. It's an excellent way of incorporating detective mode directly into the experience without making it an entirely separate entity by mapping it to a button press, and is arguably a better method of integration than that found it the home console games.

We only got time with the PlayStation Vita version of Blackgate during our gamescom experience, but of course we took the opportunity to make enquiries on the differences between our demo and that on offer on the 3DS. Essentially, we were told, the game is the same on each platform with only minor control mapping changes as a result of the hardware. The 3DS's second screen will also be dedicated to a map, which was only available at a button press on the Vita.

Due to hardware differences, the Vita version features a slightly higher resolution than that its 3DS counterpart. Of course, the 3DS makes up for this with its 3D effects, so it's a tradeoff that has to be considered for those with access to both platforms.

The lack of an open world and the transition to a 2D play environment means that Blackgate cannot be accurately compared to the rest of the Arkham series in terms of overall experience. However, it is set to be an extremely accomplished side-scrolling adventure that successfully captures the feel of being the Batman, and so is likely to be a welcome addition to the gaming collection of those who are seeking to expand on their experience with the franchise.

Batman: Arkham City Origins Blackgate is being developed by Armature Studio and will be released on PlayStation Vita and 3DS on October 25th 2013.

Ross D. Brown

See you in Gotham